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JAPANESE ARMY BRUTALITY DURING THE ASIAN-PACIFIC WAR:

Origins, Causes, Denials, and Imperial Responsibility.

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By

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God, who has bestowed upon me the ability and means to pursue my passion for history.

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

### JAPANESE ARMY BRUTALITY DURING THE ASIAN-PACIFIC WAR:

Origins, Causes, Denials, and Imperial Responsibility.

by

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American Public University System, October 26, 2014

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This thesis chronicles and analyzes the facets of Japanese society that manifested in a cultural of cruelty exhibited by Imperial soldiers during the Asian-Pacific War. The study examines the influence the Meiji Restoration reined upon modern Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It will explain how and why the Meiji leaders successfully indoctrinated a sovereign nation into a virtual cultural adherence to an ideology of a divine and infallible Emperor. This ideology was also used as a tool to foment insatiable obedience and duty to military service as a means to protect the Emperor, the nation and its people. The use of mystic religious tenets and ancient military codes were altered to further militarize public schools and institutions, and increase military élan amongst its soldiers. All of this was accelerated under the reign of the Showa Emperor until his renouncement in 1946. Finally, this paper will expose the duplicity of the Imperial throne as it denied any culpability for its role in Japan's wartime behavior. In the end, modern day Japan still struggles to accept its responsibility for its actions as its ancient culture and mores remain significant obstacles to the naked truth of its execution of atrocities.

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## Introduction

Before and during World War II, Japanese forces murdered millions of civilians and POWs. The question always asked is why? Wherever the Japanese soldiers were deployed during the 1930s and 1940s, they participated in untold acts of barbaric and inhumane treatment of civilians and enemy combatants. The documented examples of this behavior are legion; from the widespread rape of Nanking, the gang rape and murder of British and Chinese nurses to the cruel and mind-boggling treatment of Allied prisoners. What is telling is just 4% of Allied prisoners in German hands died during the war, while 27% died at the hands of the Japanese. It is estimated that by the time the war ended the Japanese soldiers had murdered as many as twenty million people.<sup>1</sup> "Why was the Japanese military deliberately brutal towards defeated enemies and civilian populations of the conquered lands? Can we even understand why they committed crimes that go so far beyond generally accepted military conduct?"<sup>2</sup>

After the Pacific War ended, and the International Military Tribunal was established, many military, political, and civilian observers were shocked by the litany of charges of atrocities committed by the soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army. As the IMT proceeded with its prosecution of war criminals, the revelations became more pronounced as the Western world was presented with further documentation of crimes committed against Allied POW's, enemy combatants and civilians of Japanese occupied lands. These events impelled historical and psychological professionals to inquire a most basic question: Why were the Japanese so brutal during the Pacific War? It is a question that still resonates to this day. It is not without various disparate theories, yet there are few who disagree on some of the basic traits that permeated the IJA culture: strict obedience, ferocity in battle, deprivation, racial superiority, and "fighting

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<sup>1</sup> Marl Felton, "A Culture of Cruelty" *Military History* Vol. 27 Iss. 5 (Jan 2011) 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.



spirit”. However, while some of these traits could be found in most of the Allied and Axis armed forces, what did the Japanese soldier possess, in terms of a mind set, that unleashed untold of accounts of brutality and the incessant acts of atrocity?

Up until the 1931 “China Incident”, the Japanese soldier, with some exceptions, did not display widespread inclinations toward malfeasant behavior. In fact, arguably the IJA acted humanely toward its erstwhile “enemies” during the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5. Although there were instances of brutality during these respective wars, most were isolated and the Military Elites condemned these acts as a violation of “proper soldiering”. Nevertheless, this attitude, this supposed honorable system of treatment of enemy combatants began to change after 1910. It was not a drastic transformation, but a slow and systematic methodology that would manifest into the horrors of atrocities committed during the Asian-Pacific War. However, there is still some disagreement amongst historians as to the origins and the causal factors of these changes.

Some authors, such as John Dower<sup>3</sup>, assert the actions were a result of a race war. This neatly compartmentalizes the entire conflict into a simple explanation, but this theory is deficient in a proper synthesis of other aspects of the Pacific War and dismisses highly relevant issues of culture, education and imperial influence and coercion placed upon the Japanese populace during the interwar years. Other historians claim it was due to the difficult and brutal training incurred by conscripts before entering the battlefield. Yet, others believe the seeds of brutality were ingrained into the Japanese culture and education long before the first recruit ever entered the

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<sup>3</sup> See John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) Dower relies on unconventional primary resources to ascertain his premise. The liberal use of cartoons, newspaper articles, anecdotal sound bites and public attitudes are cited as primary sources, with little use of official government documents-both Japanese and American.

service. Further, historians Herbert Bix<sup>4</sup> and David Bergamini<sup>5</sup> argue that Hirohito and his own emperor ideology heavily influenced the culture of the Japanese national polity through the Imperial Rescripts and his intervention in political and military policy. Additionally, during the early Showa period, the public educational infrastructure, which was established during the Meiji era, was dominated by nationalists and militarists in order to indoctrinate students. “The Army was attuned to educational changes and concentrated on indoctrinating an increasingly literate public and conscript force with the themes of Japan’s uniqueness by virtue of the unbroken Imperial line.”<sup>6</sup> In short, Hirohito was a direct descendent of the founding Sun goddess of Japan and was divine in his natural state and demanded complete obedience.

Some historians assert that the intentional distortion of the sacred Bushido code and the infusion of questionable Shinto tenets within Bushido greatly attributed to the fanaticism of the IJA soldier.<sup>7</sup> However, Karl Friday convincingly argues that the modern Bushido had little connection to the ancient doctrine that existed for centuries before it was intentionally manipulated to fit the military’s training methods.<sup>8</sup> Shinto tenets were believed to have been intentionally manufactured to further strengthen the “fighting spirit” of the Japanese soldier. Although Shintoism was promulgated in ancient times with direct influences from Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, it was not so much as a religion, but a form of patriotism exulted to

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (Perennial Books, 2000)

<sup>5</sup> David Bergamini, *Japan’s Imperial Conspiracy: How Emperor Hirohito led Japan into War against the West*. 2 Vols. (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1971)

<sup>6</sup> Edward Drea, *Japan’s Imperial Army Its Rise and Fall, 1853-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 73.

<sup>7</sup> See Daugherty, Leo J III, *Fighting Techniques of a Japanese Infantryman 1941-1945: Training, Techniques and Weapons* (St. Paul: MBI Publishing, 2002.) and Gordon L. Rottman. *Japanese Infantrymen 1937-45: Sword of the Empire*. (Osprey Publishing, 2005). Both authors assert that the Bushido (Way of the Warrior) was a primary cause for the combat related atrocities.

<sup>8</sup> See Karl Friday, “Bushido or Bull: A Medieval Historian’s Perspective on the Imperial Army and the Japanese Warrior Tradition,” *Society for History Education* Vol. 27 Iss. 3 (May 1994): 339-349.

the rank of a national creed.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Shintoism and Japanese nationalistic patriotism were practically inseparable. With the Emperor as the spiritual leader of Shinto, with its tenets infused into the modern bushido, an ethic developed that demanded an absolute loyalty and sacrifice to the Imperial Throne. Hence, as Japanese society developed into a unified and seemingly collective nation beholden to a monolithic imperial system, all the aforementioned political, military and cultural tenets were subsumed into a singular doctrine that guided a nation into a devastating war and humiliating defeat. In the process, it imbued a generation of soldiers with a fanatical sense of reverence toward an imperial or emperor ideology.

In order to assess a rational argument for the genesis of the brutality, all the above factors must be studied as a whole in order to understand at least a basic understanding of the mindset of the Japanese foot soldier. However, one facet that remained constant during the entire Asian Pacific War was the Emperor. “Although he was not by any means always at the center of events in this history, the Showa Emperor was one of the most controversial figures in modern times. In particular, the role played in the decade of Japanese expansionism leading to the 1941-1945 Asian-Pacific War remains to this day the subject of great debate both within Japan and overseas.”<sup>10</sup> Hirohito reigned at the zenith of an atrocious empirical system steeped in fascism, ancient mysticism, militarism and nationalism. Yet, he denied any culpability of his nation’s actions after the surrender, with many of his defenders deflecting attention to the Emperor at the cost of their own lives. Nevertheless, the truth of his accountability lies elsewhere, as his influence and intervention, more so than any other aspect, played a significant role in Japan’s actions during the war. Was he solely responsible for the atrocities committed in his name? Was

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<sup>9</sup> George Augustus Cobbold, *Religion in Japan: Shintoism, Buddhism, Christianity* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1894.) Reprint, Lexington: Ulan Press, 2013. 20

<sup>10</sup> Stephen S. Large, *Emperor Hirohito & Showa Japan: A Political History*. (London: Routledge, 1992.), 2.

he aware of them and could he have taken action? Did he care to take action, or was this a part of war the Emperor distanced himself from? Given that dearth of documentation, - most was burned after the August 15 capitulation- it becomes somewhat elusive to definitively assert the extent of Hirohito's role during the war.

Historian Edward Drea insists that Hirohito does not measure up as a true supreme commander or Generalissimo.<sup>11</sup> In the context of Mussolini or Hitler one would argue this is true. However, as research will show, Hirohito's sanctions and seal of approval gave Japan's militarists and commanders the Imperial approval of all war plans. Hirohito was an undeniably important cog to the Japanese war machine. Peter Wetzler, a prominent historian, proffers that Hirohito was hardly the titular head of the Japanese government, but was, in fact, involved with the political and military policy during his reign up to 1945. However, Wetzler contends that the nature of his participation and the extent of his influence are elusive due to reliable sources.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Drea and Bix have argued convincingly that the Emperor was privy to most, if not all, strategic and operational military decisions. Additionally, research will illustrate that inculcation of the Japanese nation under the emperor ideology not only accelerated upon the ascension of Hirohito to emperor, but also reverted that sovereignty back to Meiji era repression of any dissension toward the Throne. Thus, arguably Hirohito could be seen as the nexus of the complete indoctrination of a nation and its military, however, was he solely the link, the locus of power that created the fanatical Japanese soldier?

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<sup>11</sup> Drea, Edward J, *In The Service of The Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.), 215.

<sup>12</sup> See, Peter Wetzler, *Hirohito and War: Imperial Tradition and Military Decision Making in Prewar Japan*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998.)

This thesis will argue that there were, in fact, many facets within Japanese society that conspired to turn a formal feudal state into a sovereignty that was beholden to a divine emperor and protected by a well trained military. Further, this transformation was systematic and progressively dominated by the military elites. It began with the Meiji Restoration, saw a certain “openness” during the Taisho era, but reconstituted under the auspices of the Showa Emperor. Further, oppressive government control over the education system, media and individual opposition, and the attendant military influence was nearly complete by 1937. This dogmatic infusion of emperor ideology permeated virtually every facet of Japanese society and manifested in the blood drenched offensives that set off the litany of atrocities committed by the Japanese soldier. In the end, however, research and recent scholarship will demonstrate that Japan still suffers from a “collective amnesia” that dates back to the Tokyo Crime Trials. Many veterans of the Pacific war refuse to acknowledge the brutal conduct of their contemporaries, much less their own behavior. Although much has been offered to the reasons for these behaviors, there remains one fascinating, yet conspicuous element to this phenomena- that of the cultural precept of “saving face.” This aspect, which is so heavily accepted as natural and cultural more within the ethos of Japanese intellectual thought, may never be penetrated and thus Japan’s future will remain tenuous in the context of its quest as regional power.

## **Chapter I**

### **The Seeds: The Meiji Restoration, the Education of an Emperor and the Inculcation of a Nation**

By the Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan's isolationist era ended and with it the Shogunate ruling class. It was quickly understood that their small military bands were no match for the Western style incursions and a necessary transformation of Ancient Japan would be necessary for the nation to compete with the Occidental sovereignties economically, politically and most importantly, militarily. Hence, empiricist reformers began a reformation of the nation that would change the fabric of Japan's political and military system forever. In order to keep up with the newly found Western ideal of colonialism, the restoration of the Emperor was revived, thus rendering the reigning shogunate obscure forever. The Emperor Meiji ascended to the throne in early 1867 that marked a new era for the restoration of both the Imperial throne and legitimacy of an Imperial Army. The existence and control of the Emperor Meiji was considered a legitimate and symbolic possession that bestowed the Army as the official military arm of the nation of Japan. This Imperial presence that conferred legitimacy on this newly formed Army was seen as a threat to the Shogunate forces who still maintained visions of returning to a samurai based Army. In early 1868, radical leaders obtained an Imperial rescript from Meiji that authorized the overthrow of the shogunate provinces and its armies. Armed with the rescript, an Imperial restoration was declared and ordered the shogun to surrender all power and lands to the Army. "Then, once the destruction of the shogunate was accomplished by the Meiji restoration of 1868, ... there began the modern transformation of the Japanese monarchy through the

'invention of tradition' blending certain elements adapted from Japan's historical legacy and others adapted from the contemporary West.”<sup>13</sup>

The restoration named the Emperor as its national leader, spiritual leader and the chief of the Yamato race. This was a basic tenet of imperial divinity as the Emperor was believed to be a direct descendent of the most powerful Japanese deity; the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, who was believed to be the founder of the Yamato race. This perception bestowed upon the Emperor a great reverence; as he was seen as a deity that commanded complete and subservient obedience from his subjects. It is important to understand that Japanese history was often told within the context of a divine right theory. National honor was the zenith of spiritual progress centered on the superiority of the Yamato race. Imperial destiny became part of a new national faith that was recovered with the restoration of the imperial system; with Meiji as its newly endowed leader.<sup>14</sup>

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 essentially ended continuity with its feudal past; but not its spiritual culture. For the new Imperial government, Japan was now seen as a collective consciousness in a monolithic nation that shared a common language and ethnic mix. They had nearly two-thousand years of spiritual development that had been uninterrupted by any type of invasion or large scale immigration and possessed a remarkably homogenous culture. It's not surprising that hostility towards the West furthered this new nationalism as Japan wished to retain much of its ancient spiritual and mystical past, but also thrust itself into the modern world without any regard to the reconciliation between its past and its present.

The main instrument of this new nationalism was recognition of the Imperial Throne as the epicenter of Japanese collective thought and spiritual worship. The Emperor Meiji was

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<sup>13</sup> Large, *Emperor Hirohito*, 7

<sup>14</sup> Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army*, 6

considered to be a direct descendent of the original founder and first Emperor of the Japanese people. However, the reformists and the Emperor certainly knew that to strengthen his image as a deity required far more than a national army and the pronouncement by military and imperial leaders of the Emperor's divinity. "At the heart of the nation-building program was the imperial institution and the government's campaign to make it the focus of the nation. This they had originally hoped to achieve by making Shinto the official state religion".<sup>15</sup> Shinto tenets were more than religious teachings as they also proscribed a sense of racial, cultural, and spiritual superiority. It is within this context that the country interpreted itself and recognized itself as a racially superior nation, with the Emperor as its deity, and recognized no moral authority higher than itself and the Emperor. Despite the lofty goals of the Emperor and his acolytes, there was stiff resistance to end the shogunate era, and an expected civil war ensued.

The Japanese Civil War immersed into a vicious fight against the Imperial reformers and the traditionalists who were struggling to keep the samurai system intact. The reformers certainly understood that in order for Japan to become a power in the new modern world, it must be united not only as a collective nation, but also required a modern national Army. This modern army would be replete with conscripts from all the vagaries of Japanese society, an ideal completely foreign to the elite samurai opposition leaders. Despite the superior performance by an outnumbered and undermanned shogunate force, the newly formed national army proved victorious in the war. This victory was a turning point in the creation of a Japanese sovereignty and a national Army. The lower classes had gained a tremendous prestige by participating in the victory against the samurai class; which many viewed as elitist. These conscripts had been lifted out of an oppressed life and began an ascension within the social scale. The social revolution was

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<sup>15</sup> Meirion and Susie Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun: The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army* (New York: Random House 1991) 40.



guided by the new government and united by the bond of military socialism and invariably Shintoism. For the Japanese government it offered an opportunity to keep the spirit of nationalism and *Yamato damashii* (fighting spirit) within the policy of a strong military force and an Imperial throne with unlimited power, in terms of spiritual guidance.<sup>16</sup>

The Samurai, who had been playing a large part in the protection of individual warlord and shogunate estates prior to the restoration, proved to be a major obstacle in uniting Japan under one Emperor. The samurai had been a revered class within Japan for nearly 2600 years, and were guided by an extraordinary code of an unquestioning loyalty that had been established through centuries of exploits on the battlefield that transcended the tradition of extraordinary courage that would evolve into the bushido code. Despite the fact that the new government wished to eliminate the samurai completely, they certainly recognized that the opposition forces had displayed a superior élan and fighting spirit despite the lack of modernize weaponry. “In short, anti-government forces exhibited the type of battlefield behavior and morale that the government rarely saw in the new army’s conscript soldiers.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, it can be inferred, the new Imperial Army certainly would require and necessarily utilize samurai tenets in the future training of its foot soldiers. It was quite clear that the poorly trained government troops had won through sheer firepower, despite outnumbering the oppositional Army. This training would be led a group of radical young reformers who had forged personal relationships as young men at war bonded by danger. Their personal ties created a web of informal connections that transcended the emerging political, military, and bureaucratic institutions within the new

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<sup>16</sup> Bonner F. Fellers, *Psychology of the Japanese Soldier, Part I* (Washington D.C.: BiblioGov Project, 2012.) Originally Published 1936.: 22

<sup>17</sup> Drea, *Japan’s Imperial Army*, 19.

Imperial government.<sup>18</sup> The change would be slow, systematic and experience many obstacles. However, they and their followers would see their efforts come to fruition by the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Meiji government realized that reconciliation with its own people was necessary to unify the nation and stimulate a popular consensus enshrining the concept of the empire. Without it, the primacy of nationalistic and empiricist sovereignty would not be realized. Thus, it was incumbent upon the ruling elites to form a constitution that would engender the precepts of an Imperial monarchy that reflected his divinity and the importance of establishing a national polity based on an empiricist culture and society.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, an assembly of government bureaucrats (appointed by Meiji) produced a constitution that has been subject of much interpretation by historians. There are arguably some articles that contradict each other in terms of the limitation of power. However, the constitution “ascribed to the emperor enormous civil powers”<sup>19</sup> with little interpretative limits on imperial influence and intervention on military matters. Although the constitution created a constitutional monarchy, its lack of explicit limitations on Imperial power left it open to a wide interpretation of the exact nature of the emperor’s role in government. The constitution ratified in 1890 did, in fact, confer “an unqualified, all encompassing power”<sup>20</sup> upon the Imperial Throne that would later act as the basis for Hirohito’s increased role in war time policies. This is not surprising as witnessed by some of the constitutions basic tenets:

“The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors  
unbroken for ages eternal...The Emperor is sacred and inviolable...The Emperor

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>19</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 58.

<sup>20</sup> Bergamini, *Japan’s Imperial Conspiracy*, 338.

exercises the legislative with the consent of the Imperial Diet...The Emperor gives sanctions to laws, and orders them to be promulgated and executed...The Emperor determines the organization of the different branches of the administrations...The Emperor has the supreme command of the Army and Navy...and determines the organization and peace standing of the Army and Navy...The Emperor declares war, makes peace and concludes treaties...orders amnesty, pardon, commutation of punishment and rehabilitation.”<sup>21</sup>

What is implicit with this so-called constitutional monarchy is that it truly was an autocratic relationship between the Emperor and the rest of the country; including the Diet. This was to be a lesson that was imbued into Hirohito from the time he was able to understand and comprehend his future role as an Emperor. Hirohito was being trained to be a superior power; or an autocrat, to assure the continued progression of lineage of the Imperial throne. Any interpretation countering the power of the emperor in the context of the constitution was introduced as means of separating the Imperial Throne from any culpability of responsibility of its decisions. In short, the constitution bestowed the emperor great powers, but at the same time protected him from any responsibility of bad policy that would threaten the Crown. By claiming non-responsibility for any action proscribed by the Cabinet and the Diet, the Throne would be exempt from any public scrutiny and thus exonerate itself from any political fall-out. Thus, the Emperor was to bear no responsibility for any Imperial decisions as they were to be enacted and executed by those considered beneath the realm of the Imperial Court. The Diet and the Cabinet were all too happy to participate.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 338.

Japanese society had slowly attained near cult status during the reign of the Emperor Meiji. Many laws repressing speech and critical writing of the Imperial Throne had been in place since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. However, it should be noted that these laws and the restoration of the Meiji Constitution were not a renaissance of a new culture. "Several generations of Japanese believed the Emperor's divinity demanded unquestioning obedience of not only him, but also his representatives in the government and the military"<sup>22</sup>. Japanese culture easily accepted this idea as represented in the belief in racial superiority; thus it was Japan's divine mission to rule the world. Still, the Meiji Constitution has elucidated numerous historical and contemporary commentaries and interpretations. "The dualistic concept of monarchy found in the Meiji Constitution [has] provoked great controversy, including scholarly disputes... between proponents of absolute monarchy... and advocates of limited monarchy."<sup>23</sup>

However, a careful examination of the Meiji Constitution evinces a much different role for an Emperor that had transcend from the 1868 Charter Oath which manifested into the 1890 constitution. As it was, he was "the head of the Empire, supreme commander of the Armed Forces, and superintendent of all the powers of sovereignty. He could convoke and dissolve the Imperial Diet; issue Imperial ordinances in place of law; and appoint and dismiss ministers of state, civil officials, military officers and determine their salaries.... This system of government can be called a kind of constitutionally guided but by no means constitutional monarchy."<sup>24</sup> Though the constitution specified that the Emperor was required to share power with the legislature, it was widely assumed that the latter would simply reflect the wishes of the Throne.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Meiji Constitution's primary and most significant principle was to respect the sole

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<sup>22</sup> Felton, "Culture of Cruelty", 28.

<sup>23</sup> Large, *Emperor Hirohito*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

rights of the Emperor. Further, and equally important, a secondary principle was to insulate and protect the Emperor from any public and, ostensibly, international criticism from unpopular or militaristic policy decisions. Hence, in practice, no legislative policies or laws nor military doctrine, strategy or policy ever originated from the Imperial House. Although this was true in theory and in practice, it was also easily usurped by an active and influential Emperor that assumed the powers of a supreme commander.

In theory, the independence of the supreme command assigned to the Emperor greatly increased his absolute powers at the expense of civilian control. “There was no clear definition regarding either the scope of the right of supreme command or the person responsible for exercising it.”<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless “[imperial] influence, as distinct from authority and power, is quite another matter. It has been suggested elsewhere that while power is the capacity to apply sanctions and exercising authority, influence, based on prestige, relies not on sanctions but on the ability to manipulate perceptions...”<sup>27</sup> The Constitution then dictated that the Emperor was the source of all executive, legislative, and judicial powers, and all government acts were issued in his name. The caveat, however, is the intellectuals interpreted this same Constitution to conceive ways to protect the Emperor from personal responsibility from any and all government acts: military and political. This required the various ministers and political appointees to assist the Emperor in their areas of expertise and to seek his approval. “This meant that they, not the Emperor, were accountable for government acts.”<sup>28</sup> Regardless of these protectionist practices afforded to the Imperial House, the Emperor<sup>29</sup> was highly influential in guiding political and military policy. He had a proclivity to arbitrarily assert his opinions and demands into political

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<sup>26</sup> Large, *Emperor Hirohito*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>28</sup> Wetzler, *Hirohito and War*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> The use of “Emperor” is completely interchangeable for both Meiji and Hirohito. Both exercised that same constitutional powers during their respective reigns’-until 1945.

and military affairs while retaining his cloak of separation via the constitution. Still, he recognized the conditions in which he was to operate, but often defied his advisors and continued the behind-the-scenes consultations.<sup>30</sup>

With these great extensions of power, the military justifiably believed that it had a responsibility to uphold the constitution and the Imperial system. The military was especially involved with this transition as they put into operation a system of moral training for the youth of the Empire, which would slowly generate into a systematic educational infrastructure that centered on the indoctrination of militaristic and nationalistic tenants. In essence, the Emperor and the war ministers found that to unite a Japanese nation spiritually, education was to be the nexus of inculcating a nation into the tenets of national unity.<sup>31</sup> The Meiji government recognized the need to build a modern school system. However it was done within the context of a government policy that created and provided textbooks replete with political and legal doctrines that belied Western social concepts. Meiji educational leaders and authorities wanted education to turn out citizens who enthusiastically supported national policies and the Emperor's divinity. They wished to instill in all students and future soldiers a willingness to die for their country in time of war. They constantly stressed the precept that duty to death was equivalent to loyalty to the Emperor and the love of country. Thus, the 1890 Imperial Rescript on education reinforced the tenets of the Emperor ideology as the duties and obligations of all students in the quest of a unified nation.

The Army was attuned to educational changes that concentrated on indoctrinating an increasingly literate public and conscript force with the themes of Japan's uniqueness by virtue

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<sup>30</sup> Wetzler, *Hirohito and War*, 181.

<sup>31</sup> Fellers, *Psychology*, 19.

of the unbroken Imperial line.<sup>32</sup> The military certainly was interested in the curriculum at the lower levels of school as they infused military dogma within the primary schools. Future conscripts were taught to be grateful that the Empire/Emperor awaited their service in his Army. Not surprisingly, as the education system was more militarized, the same values were steadily seeping into popular culture.<sup>33</sup>

Army leaders also grasped that mandatory schooling offered the state the opportunity to imbue patriotic, nationalistic, and military values into school children because education was a citizen's obligation and duty to the state. With the full cooperation from the educational system, the military established various youth organizations that assisted indoctrinating grade school children in military, ethical and patriotic values. They prepared the young men and boys for future military service while also indoctrinating them with the ideals of Japanese racial superiority and their allegiance to *kokutai*.<sup>34</sup> Yet, the education composition was only a partial element to foster the Emperor ideology. While the military did influence public education standards, it also required a reassessment and overhaul of its own military educational system.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese military leaders worked assiduously to rid the army ranks of the warrior class. Most of the imperial leaders distrusted these former samurai and believed they were a clear danger to the state; given its history. Although conscription was used to get rid of the samurai influence, the Japanese leaders revived ancient imperial myths and fanciful traditions that military service to the Emperor promoted loyalty to the throne while simultaneously curtailing samurai independence. "Furthermore, Army indoctrination could translate the conscripts' regional loyalties into national allegiance and send them home as

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<sup>32</sup> Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army*, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 136.

veterans to proselytize Army virtues, modernization, and proto-nationalism to their communities.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Army virtues led to extreme nationalism that could be considered the beginning of a national indoctrination of the populace, not the samurai of bushido values, but of a new dogma created by the early Army leaders to establish a definitive element of loyalty to the Army and the Emperor as a nationalistic ethic that was to be admired individually and collectively.

“The new Army needed a new ethos. For this it needed at its heart a cohesive and permanent officer Corps, with the ability constantly to regenerate itself by passing on its skills to specialized educational institutions.”<sup>36</sup> Hence the first step towards elevating Army status as a sense of pride was the establishment of military schools and academies. These schools proved to be the harbinger of creating national pride and service to the Army and the Emperor. At the center of these new military schools, not surprisingly, was a samurai tradition of Bushido.

“The new Meiji leaders relied heavily on the Imperial institution to connect past to present when formulating national values. The Army in particular stressed its links to the Emperor to inculcate loyalty in the ranks.”<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that the first military rescript of 1872 pronounced that a soldier’s duty was based on loyalty to the throne, obedience to orders, courtesy and respect for his superiors, and a prohibition of all types of disruptive conduct. These practices had been part of the bushido, but had never been formalized into an institutionalized classroom practice. Further, Shinto ideology was also included in the curricula as a propaganda tool that served only as method for a further pervasive and insidious infusion of imperial nationalism. Nonetheless, the Imperial Japanese Army was created quickly with a singular

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>36</sup> Harries, *Soldiers*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Drea, *Japan’s Imperial Army*, 31.



determination of adherence to emperor ideology. It was considered a modern military organization replete with western style organization and structure.<sup>38</sup> Its education and conscription composition was emplaced for future adjustments and increased enrollment. Although a new army had been created, there was really no popular base to support and the samurai were still meddling in other military affairs. Yet the Meiji military leaders had constructed a framework for a national Army that relied on obedience to the Emperor, who also was their military leader, and began the indoctrination of the Army as a necessary ingredient within national polity: *kokutai*.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the basic tenets of unified nation-in-arms philosophy were serving both the education of an increasingly literate and urban populace and the political requisites of the military. “The Meiji state, with its ambitions of establishing Japan as an equal to the Western great powers, needed to mobilize the nation to fight wars in order to consolidate its international status. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a series of measures were enacted to construct the Emperor-centered nationalism, namely the Imperial Rescript to the Army and the Navy of 1882, the Meiji Constitution of 1889, and the 1890 Imperial Rescript for Education.”<sup>39</sup> With the basic elements in place to create a new society within emperor ideology, with an Imperial Army beholden to these cultural mores and the Emperor, it was a matter of time before a “new Japan” would be put the test; not only militarily, but politically. That chance would soon arrive by 1894 and consummate its “Occidental” status by 1905.

The Japanese Army had, since its inception during the Meiji Restoration, wished to impress upon the Occidental powers its prowess as an effective fighting force. The ruling elites

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<sup>38</sup> Harries, *Soldiers*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Naoko Shimazu. “The Myth of the ‘Patriotic Soldier’: Japanese Attitudes Toward Death in the Russo-Japanese War,” *War & Society* Vol. 14 Iss. 2 (October 2001); 70.

longed to exhibit the Army's dedication to national unity by creating a ferocious army, imbued with *Yamato damashii* (fighting spirit), indoctrinated with emperor ideology and complete obedience to both imperial rescripts and superior orders. Unfortunately, with an army largely conscripted from the rural areas, this would prove to be a jingoistic embellishment rather than actual performance on the battlefield<sup>40</sup> The myth of the "patriotic soldier" had been largely created by the ruling elites primarily to convince and instill a sense of nationalistic pride amongst the populace. Nevertheless, the IJA was successful in its war against the Chinese in 1894-5. The victory certainly caught the western powers by surprise, as the IJA surprised their Occidental contemporaries with their well-trained and organized officer corps during mobilization and combat. To the West, "the Japanese soldiers had a commitment defined by specific objectives and accepted a common ethos that subscribed to a goal greater than individual or regional interests."<sup>41</sup> While this may have been the IJA's manufactured image of its soldiers, their performance was somewhat mixed during the war.

The universal indoctrination of the imperial soldier had not been successfully accomplished due to shortened training periods and by the fact that the military and education infrastructures were still in their infancy. However, there were other consequences of the Sino-Japanese war that had been completely unexpected and would shine an unfavorable light on the IJA by the west. "Japanese soldiers were disillusioned when they saw firsthand the field the conditions and hardscrabble existence of impoverished Chinese. Admiration turned to contempt and debasement. These perceptions dovetailed with notions of Japan's uniqueness and superiority to produce popular racial stereotypes of the Chinese and China as a decaying

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>41</sup> Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army*, 83.

civilization”<sup>42</sup>. Japanese society, for centuries, had borrowed much from the Chinese culture that essentially not only defined modern Japan, but served as a source of nationalistic pride with an admirable acknowledgement to China. After defeating a much revered enemy, Japan’s attitude toward the Chinese changed dramatically and assumed a sense of superiority, racially and spiritually, over its erstwhile contemporaries. This would manifest later in the second Sino-Japanese war, but reared its ugly head during an attack at Port Arthur, in which 20,000-60,000 Chinese were massacred; many of whom were civilians. Although given strict orders by army leaders to refrain from such action, it garnered an expected outrage from the west, as Japan had wished to avoid any provocation from western society and also prevent tarnishing its image of a “western style” army. Although this was the only known atrocity committed, the west would not forget this event and held a permanent stain upon the well crafted image of the IJA.

Nonetheless the Sino-Japanese war marked the beginning of Japan’s career as an imperial power which established the IJA as a legitimate army. It also witnessed its first atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers. Notably, these atrocities had occurred before the full systematic “enlightenment” of the Japanese soldier had been achieved through the educational and cultural systems. Thus, a question is raised as to the genesis of the Port Arthur massacre: was it a result of an ancient code enjoyed by the samurai, or was this simply an anecdotal and isolated event? In the context of this particular war, it seems anecdotal, as it occurred nowhere else in the battlefield. Japan gained valuable combat experience against a woefully led Chinese army, but still had much work to fully realize its ultimate goal for the nation and the armed forces: complete cult adherence to the Emperor ideology. Fortuitously, the wait for another chance, this time with an occidental power-Russia, would occur only ten years later.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 87.

The Russo-Japanese war established Japan as a true war power as it convincingly defeated an occidental western-style Army. Not surprisingly, Japanese officers and NCOs appeared to be far superior to their Russian counterparts; an element that arguably was the result of military training and educational systems that had been reformed in 1900. Additionally, the Japanese fighting spirit was an element of war that the Russians had not seen before. The Japanese certainly had a determination to win at any cost, as they were slowly growing into a unified force fighting for the Empire. Although outnumbered in some fields of battle, the IJA soldier proved his mettle with suicidal frontal attacks that astonished even the most hardened Russian soldier. It was here that the more extreme elements of dying as a duty to the Emperor were shown; however, it was not by any means a widespread practice. Regardless of some of the soldiering deficits, the victory emboldened the Imperial Army into understanding they were now a force to be reckoned. However, lingering problems with conscripts in the field of combat still needed to be addressed.

The Army's analysis of its performance during the Russian war precipitated a change in doctrine. There was a fundamental shift from intensive fire-power to hand-to-hand combat. This was based on the performance of the individual troops during the war. They believed that a determined infantry attack displaying *seishin* was the most proficient use against an enemy given the superiority of the training of the foot soldier. In practice, ordinary soldiers did not fight ruthlessly to the bitter end because of a common samurai gene pool or military heritage. The great paradox is that the only samurai that the military leaders ever trusted were themselves. Appeals to the mythical warrior ethos were government and army devices to promote the morale of a conscript force that neither civil nor military leaders held in much regard. Since absolute loyalty meant that the Japanese soldiers were expected to show a direct willingness to die for the

Emperor, loyalty to death was a central tenant of the patriotic soldier. Again the “Way the Warrior” was imposed upon both officers and conscripts, but had little allegiance from the conscripted soldier. However, the military desperately needed to integrate ordinary soldiers-most of which had non-samurai backgrounds-with the great nationalist agenda that the military academies had properly imbued upon its officers.

One of these aspects that was borne in the aftermath of the Russo Japanese war was the lionizing soldiers who died in defense of the Empire, and those who committed ritual suicide as a result of their self-inflicted idea of lack of duty. Yet, the typical soldier who participated in the Russian war saw death as tragic and pitiful. Further, they did not feel that their destiny lie in their own hands but in the hands the enemy. This, of course, was a complete anathema to the way of the warrior, and following the war, the military leaders and elites would diligently attempt to change these attitudes. They appealed to a strong sense of racial and nationalistic pride to imbue future conscripts to accept an Emperor-centered nation and military. Still, soldiers in the battlefield never were sold on the propagandized and jingoistic tenet that dictated soldiers seek honorable war death inspired by an emperor ideology. “Many soldiers felt they could not be totally honest with their feelings when faced with their public persona as ‘soldiers’. This is where the Emperor-system ideology managed to have some success in pressuring the soldiers to adopt the nationalist discourse because many felt compelled to identify with the cultural ideal, albeit negatively, in order to ease social dissonance.”<sup>43</sup> The soldiers realized they had to maintain a motivational fighting element to appease their superior officers. They obviously feared some kind of repercussion if they had even suggested or had written about the true nature of the battle they were involved; and their objections to the “honorable death”. Lower ranking soldiers simply

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<sup>43</sup> Shimazu, “Patriotic Soldier”, 84.

did not identify with the cultural idea which expected them to show loyalty to the Emperor through an honorable death in combat. Reasons for this vary, but the most common trait was that most came from different socio-economic backgrounds which did not share the cultural values symbolized by the myth of the “patriotic soldier”.<sup>44</sup> For the majority of soldiers, dying in battle was, in reality, tragic and painful and a far cry from the great and glorious death and its subsequent exaltation that the military leaders proclaimed was the destiny for the common foot soldier.

Most of the soldiers went to war because they had no choice and faced hard repercussions from the government for avoiding military service. Unlike their future comrades in World War II, they truly feared death and were horrified what they had witnessed in combat. It is also testament to the ineffective indoctrination that the Meiji government had instilled at the grassroots level prior to 1904. Due to this systematic failure, the Meiji political and military leaders embarked on a great, yet latent, reform of both the educational and military infrastructures within Japan. They sought to avoid the problems of the early conscripts and a rebellious minority that was in direct conflict with the elitist’s vision of an emperor- centered nationalist government.

“Postwar assessments determined that spiritual or intangible attributes had to be inculcated into the ranks, and authorities launched an intensive indoctrination program to instill the national Army with fighting spirit... once that concept gained acceptance, death in battle became the standard by which to measure fighting spirit.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, in 1904, a thesis named “The Way of the Japanese Subject” was introduced into the primary schools for the purpose of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>45</sup> Drea, *Japan’s Imperial Army*, 46.

preserving nationalism. The text was so universally welcomed it was considered the nation's Bible for education. Most of its content had been taken from the Imperial Rescript on education, which was considered the holiest writ for the Japanese soldier in performing his duty.<sup>46</sup> This Imperial rescript was stocked with jingoistic patriotic lessons. It demanded loyalty as it served as a spinal nerve of all Japanese subjects. Loyalty implied an unchanging reverence to the Imperial line, with no dissenting voice amongst the subjects of the Empire. Thus to serve the Empire with unfettered loyalty was a superior duty of any Japanese subject, which manifested into the idea that this loyalty was superior to all foreign races.<sup>47</sup>

The Russo- Japanese war had validated new “bedrock principles of military discipline- nationalism, patriotism, and service to the Emperor.”<sup>48</sup> These principles manifested in elevating the Imperial house as not only central to the nation's belief system, but also a deeply embedded element within the fabric of society. “None was more powerful than *kokutai*, the notion of Imperial Japan as unique nation by virtue of its sacred Emperor.”<sup>49</sup> For the Imperial Throne, *kokutai* served as the concept to preserve the unbroken imperial line. For the military, it meant the preservation of the Imperial system which became the repository for the values and virtues of the Imperial Army.<sup>50</sup> No matter who Japan would go to war with, the preservation of the *kokutai* was an absolute necessity within the Imperial Council and the Armed Forces. Thus the basis for Japanese behavior within the Armed Forces against enemy combatants had been laid. Any threat to the *kokutai* would be met with as much resistance and any tactic necessary to protect the Emperor.

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<sup>46</sup> Fellers, *Psychology*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>48</sup> Drea, *Service of the Emperor*, 171.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 172.

The legacy of the Russo-Japanese war would resonate during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Strict censorship played well with the Army's carefully cultivated image as an institution that served at the behest of the Emperor and that the nation should establish great patriotism and obedience to both the Emperor and the military. By 1910, the Japanese military had set forth a fundamental principle that would become the bedrock of future Japanese tactical doctrine. Japan's unique history and culture (*kokutai*), combined with national characteristics such as obedience and adherence to the superiority of the Yamato race, would determine the future nature and culture of the Army. Future training would incorporate these intangibles that they believed would enhance technical proficiency gained from military doctrine. In the end, Japan's foreign wars sharpened its popular sense of a national identity and cemented national solidarity. They had achieved a victory over a major Western power that the Meiji leaders had envisioned for its national Army nearly twenty-five years earlier. Its goals to create a unified country and strong army had been realized by 1905. It coincided with a new nationalism that reasserted mythical Japanese values that were often in conflict with Western techniques and culture that many associated with a social malaise that degraded traditional morality in Japan. Hence Japan, in its eyes, was becoming a major power . It was an imperious impressment that had been envisioned by the ruling elites of the Meiji Restoration to create a country that was emboldened to protect its ancient history, and also its new modern identity as a unique society that had, in fact, used ancient rituals with Western military doctrine. Nonetheless, it was this new doctrine, which would send Japan, and ostensibly its soldiers, into believing in their own invincibility and the reckless disregard for non-Yamato races. It was within the context of this national cleansing and indoctrination that the future Showa Emperor- Hirohito- began his education.



Hirohito's education has never been the object of much in-depth research or scholarship. The reasons are varied. There is little documentation of his early life due to the destruction of imperial and government official papers following the capitulation of 14 August 1945. There are no known diaries or personal papers compiled during this epoch; at least none that are available to the public. Even conversations with imperial court members and Diet members from that era remain elusive. Because of the dearth of material left behind, historians were forced to rely on a core of indirect evidence comprised of memoirs, diaries and testimony of court and political officials, much of which are difficult to re-assemble due to their inherent disparity. Thus, much of the early *Showa* era history is highly dependent on inferences "drawn from postwar political policies and ideological preconceptions..."<sup>51</sup> His educational years were no different, although his tutors' philosophies can be traced to their respective publications prior to and after the official education of Hirohito.

Arguably, the education of Hirohito began under the auspices of the Meiji Constitution. The basis of Hirohito's prolonged and protracted schooling started with the belief that the entire history of Japan centered not only upon Meiji, but also the idea that the monarch was a living god expressed in the lofty language of Imperial rescripts. He was a descendent of a sun goddess that held the origins of Japan's status as a divine nation. The imperial lineage, as it was mythologized, was unbroken since the beginning of time. Hence, the Emperor retained a transcendent heavenly status within Japanese culture. "[The] vast majority of the population came to take these myths very seriously [as they believed] the Emperor played the role of a god and the people the role of the subjects."<sup>52</sup> This concept implied a special type of conduct towards the Emperor, one of absolute loyalty and obedience to the throne; and in return the Emperor

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<sup>51</sup> Wetzler, *Hirohito and War*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Large, *Emperor Hirohito*, 8.

would be considered as the parent to his Japanese subjects or, his nation of children. Thus this "family" was expected to work hard with dignity and honor, and to respect all the aspects of the Imperial throne.

His primary tutors, Shigetake Sugiura and Kurakichi Shiratori were handpicked by the imperial court and held responsible to the secondary education of Hirohito. Many scholars considered both tutors to be nationalistic and chauvinistic sycophants to the mythology of the imperial line at the expense of the truth. This assertion is somewhat misleading in light of judging both professors through western culture and contemporaneous values. Both were influenced by Darwinism and some western philosophies.<sup>53</sup> Still, they imparted much myth and mysticism at the expense of accurate history to impel upon the young Prince the importance of the Imperial line. However, it should be noted that both were beholden to the education system in place at the time that adhered to such educational practices. It was within this context that Hirohito would begin his education and his tutors provided the necessary scholarship for the Crown Prince to absorb.

Hirohito's military training was strict in its instruction. It included a combination of Confucianism, bushido, and precepts of Zen. Hirohito was educated within the realm of a true military atmosphere. He was just not being trained in Japanese military concepts and dogma, but was being prepared as the future supreme commander of all Japanese armed military forces. He was to be no ordinary soldier, but a deity in which all orders, procedures, strategies, objectives, and general warfare were to be sanctioned by the Emperor, as they were considered to be incomplete without this accord from the Imperial throne.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 14.

His religious education centered primarily on Shintoism. As high priest of state Shinto, Hirohito considered himself a ruler who had inherited his spiritual authority from his ancestors and believed he was morally accountable to them than he was to his own subjects. It was his deceased ancestors that were the source of his powers, and it was to them he paid homage, rather than his subjects. But in reality, with the source of his power, his subjects were expected "to subscribe to state Shinto, and to put service in the state and duty to the Emperor ahead of private interests and pleasures."<sup>54</sup>

His teachers had also sought to prepare him for the differing roles that would come into play when it came to the status of the Empire. He was taught, in preparation for ruling in the mold of Meiji, "the official interpretation of the nation's history, which combined elements of nationalism and racism in the midst of his descent from the gods. Although as Crown Prince he inhabited a moral sphere in which questions of personal accountability for the exercise of power and authority would not arise, he was indoctrinated in the same myths that were put forth in the nation's primary and military schools."<sup>55</sup> The Imperial family, atop the national hierarchy of hereditary houses, and the nobility directly below them, may not all have agreed that Hirohito was descended from the gods, but he understood the efficacy of that belief and it became a working part of his identity.<sup>56</sup>

As Hirohito's education transpired up until his enthronement, the idea of national polity took on a much more militaristic value at the expense of political and diplomatic relations with the West. It actually matured, or metastasized into a national policy that called for "unification of all the world into a happy society and the firm establishment of world peace in accordance with

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<sup>54</sup>Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 27.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

the lofty spirit”<sup>57</sup> of an ancient Japanese belief system. The Japanese state was indeed under the influence of the divine commission set to expand its sovereignty and righteousness over an ever widening world. This divine mission demanded that all aspects of Japanese society had to be subordinated to achieving the divine mission through the use of military force. Upon his enthronement, Hirohito’s education and his sense of imperial divinity would compel a nation towards utter disaster.

Hirohito’s education was not only a complex and comprehensive undertaking, but also increasingly difficult to definitively assess its actual content and influence. Although, it has been argued that Japan wished to assert itself into a “modernized” world, the Crown Prince’s base education could hardly be described as preparation of facing this “new” world. He was not trained to be a pacific and distant ruler. He was educated to become an absolute monarch. Although the Meiji Constitution specified that the Emperor was to share legislative power with the electorate, his teachers believed and assumed the Imperial Diet would reflect the Emperor’s will and never its own.<sup>58</sup> Both of his most influential professors had manipulated their lectures to center on the divine nature of the Imperial line. Both manipulated history and myth, and foreign religious principles to meld a unique Japanese philosophy that was imbued with racial purity and superiority. Their respective teachings upheld a divine nature of the throne with the Emperor as head of state and supreme commander, that would eventuate into a wartime Emperor who ruled as an absolute monarch behind the shadow of the Constitution that protected him from criticism, responsibility and culpability of his own actions during the Asian-Pacific War.

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<sup>57</sup> Daugherty III, *Fighting Techniques*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 28.

However, during Hirohito's formal educational years, Japan had experienced an atmosphere of individualism and openness under auspice of his father Yoshihito, the Taisho Emperor. This era is sometimes referred to as the Taisho democracy. The early years of his reign were somewhat unremarkable, but during and after WWI, a number of movements occurred that would shake the very foundation of emperor ideology that the Meiji leaders had worked so industriously to penetrate all facets of Japanese society. Individual liberty allowed foreign political philosophies to be openly discussed and featured in numerous media vehicles. There was a solid influx of acceptance toward a greater participation of the Japanese people within the ideal of self government; which was noted by the granting of male suffrage in future elections. Antimilitarism gradually gained support during and after World War I. "There was also open opposition to Japan's Siberian expedition to intervene in the Russian revolution."<sup>59</sup> The opposition gained steam in large part as a result of a split between Japanese leaders questioning the wisdom of participating in a very confused Russian political and military war. Further, communist literature spread throughout the early 1920's, presented numerous antimilitary ideas and unflattering descriptions of the military class. This was, of course, an anathema to the well constructed Meiji infrastructure that hoped to turn Japan into a well-heeled and unified nation with its Emperor as its head under the protection of an Imperial Army. As a result, there was a strong push-back within the military to subdue this type of individualism and anti-state thought that the hierarchy feared would permeate into the military ranks.

Yet this liberty was carefully constructed within well-defined boundaries. The centralized state remained strong as ever, even as the Diet approved universal suffrage in 1925. The accompaniment of a new Peace Preservation Law, which granted the government more extensive

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<sup>59</sup> Ienaga, Saburo, *The Pacific War: 1931-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 17.

control, was established to temper this new liberty. Summary powers were used to arrest and detain political activists and anyone who cared to venture into western governmental ideals. The government also had gained far more reaching powers to curtail free speech and suppressed any undesirable political activity that sought to undermine Japanese unity. As a result, the government clearly understood that the most powerful weapon to indoctrinate ideas and values that were conducive to amass support of a collective militaristic society was through the public education system.<sup>60</sup> Further, throughout his father's reign, Hirohito's advisors constantly worked and instructed him to devise ways to keep the monarchy and its Meiji tenets alive. This position was at odds with the Taisho's tentative and weak democratic reforms as Hirohito was considered, within the military and the Imperial Court, a champion of nationalism and tradition.<sup>61</sup> The Taisho Era ended in 1926, and the Crown Prince ascended to the throne, thus beginning the Showa Era.

Hirohito wished to reverse many of the reforms borne of his father's reign. Democratic and western liberal influence had gained a toehold in Japanese Society and the throne, Cabinet ministers, and hard-line militarists desired to expel all western thought from the nation's ethos. As a group, the political and military ministries worked to return the monarchy as the apex of class, power and wealth. This privileged group represented "the interests of all the ruling elites of Imperial Japan, including the military"<sup>62</sup>. The beginnings of a new nationalist state had started immediately under the auspices of Hirohito and his court. He spread his tentacles into every organ of state and the military and also reestablished *kokutai* as the only true national polity of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>61</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 146.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 178.

Japan; ostensibly reckoning the return of total power to the Emperor and complete obedience to his sanctions.

He began by purging his cabinet of all ministers that he personally did not approve. "With his Confucian and bushido education, Hirohito wanted officials appointed solely on the basis of ability not political criteria or affliction"; a practice that would continue throughout WWII.<sup>63</sup> Hirohito was ruthlessly gaining control of both the cabinet and the Diet by surrounding himself with hard-line militarists and politicians emboldened to the preservation of *kokutai*. The Japanese press soon began to censor itself by making sure that all coverage of the Japanese state was positive and had a nationalistic tone as to avoid being censored by Imperial authorities.<sup>64</sup> Japanese civilians were not immune from this power grab, as Hirohito also began to bring his "children" under his benevolent guidance. This guidance would signal the beginning of a reassessment and reinforcement of the cultural, educational and military reforms that had been developed during the Meiji era.

Culture and race played a significant role in the "re-education" of Japanese society. The government produced publications asserting "that the Japanese were superior to all other peoples, placing particular emphasis on the alleged altruistic, selfless devotion to the Emperor, and commitment to ancestor worship."<sup>65</sup> This necessarily required a complete expulsion of any western influence whatsoever. The Imperial court had developed "a formula for overcoming the Japanese people's keen sense of spiritual and economic subjugation by the West. It provided channels for thought and emotion in all areas of life, not just the military."<sup>66</sup> This concept, as

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 189

<sup>65</sup> Janice Matsumura, "State Propaganda and Mental Disorders: The Issue of Psychiatric Casualties among Japanese Soldier during the Pacific War. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. Vol. 78 Iss.4 (Winter 2004): 812.

<sup>66</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 11.

dictated by Imperial Rescripts, “worked to make people insensitive to the hurts imposed on others by wanton aggressiveness and self-righteousness, just as its American counterpart – the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny – had done in certain periods of aroused American nationalism.”<sup>67</sup>

This type of indoctrination could not occur without the implicit participation of the populace. Campaigns of national spiritual mobilization were introduced during the early Showa era that pushed the nation’s pride in Hirohito and itself to new heights. The Japanese Cabinet advocated education of the masses in order to cultivate the concept of *kokutai*. A national movement was established that provided instruction and guidance to the dangers of anti-establishmentarianism, while encouraging patriotic practices that would nurture national power. With these multiple goals in mind, the Ministry of Education issued a directive to all schools and colleges decreeing all curricula were to include the tenets of *kokutai*.<sup>68</sup> The Japanese ruling elites had slowly accomplished the inculcation of its populace to accept and believe in the idea of a nation whose existence was at the behest of the Emperor, protected by his Imperial Army, and a willingness to die was a matter of duty and honor.

By 1934, most of the civil rights within Japan had virtually disappeared. Tighter controls over speech and publications were further implemented to protect the state from any harmful allegations or inferences. Further, these controls were used to tighten any influence that subversive organizations may have over the general populace; primarily Communists and even libertarians. These controls were pervasive enough that they precipitated the collective effort to strengthen public unity for nationalization. In fact, national mobilization, an important facet in the theory of a unified Japan, and a vital element of conscription, was to become a national effort

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 202.



to support any organization that contributed to the ideal of duty to honorably serve the Army. Thus the government wished to “[strengthen] public unity for national mobilization by making participation in the Reservists’ Association and youth training mandatory, and by encouraging organizations such as the Youth Association, Boy Scouts, Patriotic Women’s Association, National Defense Women’s Association, Red Cross Society, Harmonization Society, Medical Relief Society, Soldiers’ Support Association and religious, social welfare and spiritual associations” to foster more participation as part of one’s patriotic duty.<sup>69</sup>

The public education system was an important target for the government re-education efforts. “The state had arrayed powerful weapons against the individual. A militaristic education implanted jingoistic ideas in the populace and overwhelmed a critical consciousness toward war. All education was standardized under the centralized control of the Ministry of Education.”<sup>70</sup> In essence, every teacher and parent had absolutely no say in the education of their pupils and children. From nursery school through high school, students were told what they would learn and what they would think. Thus, nearly all students were inculcated with a craftily constructed message, with the full backing of the government and the Imperial throne, solely through the means of implementation by militarists teachers, that proscribed a nation of unified minds and hearts to protect and retain its national polity: *kokutai*.

The success of this system was evident by the conduct of the IJA soldier during the Pacific War. Soldiers openly admitted to retaining all the teachings of the emperor ideology. They went to war convinced to the invincibility of the Japanese people.<sup>71</sup> Others were absolutely

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<sup>69</sup> Ienaga, *Pacific War*, 98.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>71</sup> Records of the War Department General and Special Staff: Interrogations of Japanese Prisoners of War. “Report of POW Yoshiaki Yokoyama”, Record Group 165, Box 913; (390/35/6-7). National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Heretofore noted as NARA.

resolved to adhere to the cause of Japan at any cost. To them, Japan was impelling its right to install a government in inferior countries as a matter bequeathed upon them as the Master Race of Asians. The IJA soldier had no reason to question this dogma as it was conveyed by the Emperor, who was their divine leader.<sup>72</sup> However, when faced with the possibility of the death of the Emperor, one soldier remarked that there would be nothing to fight for. He stated his belief that the majority of soldiers would cease fighting because the nation, the people and the Emperor were of one mind, one heart and one soul. Therefore, the risk of dying without a cause was simply superfluous.<sup>73</sup> It cannot be ascertained with certainty that the Japanese would have ceased hostilities had the Emperor been killed. Nonetheless, the IJA soldier, by the late 1930's, had certainly been indoctrinated in the emperor ideology; as had been the goal of the nation since the Meiji Restoration.

By 1937, the fanaticism of Japanese racial superiority, its indestructible patriotism, military power and devotion to the Emperor was at its zenith. This national pride, which was also part of patriotic idealism, was believed to be superior to that of any other country on earth. It concentrated on fulfilling the Emperor's commands in sacrificing oneself to the realization of the Emperor's designs.<sup>74</sup> Western Occidentals had no concept of this type of cultural devotion, thus to the Japanese, they were inferior as they were unwilling to sacrifice themselves as matter of duty and honor. Nevertheless, loyalty, fidelity, valor, and sacrifice were considered sacred actions that were expected from all Imperial subjects, and had to be acted upon as part of their patriotic duty.

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<sup>72</sup>Southeast Asia Translation and Interrogation Center. U.S. Office of War Information, New Delhi. "Prisoner of War Interrogation at Delhi, 13 January 1944". RG 165, Box 915, NARA.

<sup>73</sup> "Report on the Interrogations of Survivors from the Japanese Destroyer Matsu, Sunk on August 1944. 11 June 1944", RG 165, Box 914; NARA.

<sup>74</sup> Fellers, *Psychology*, 22.

The Japanese government, under auspices of the Showa Emperor, had successfully built a nation imbued with veneration to a divine leader, indoctrinated a generation of its populace to live or die for the sake of national polity, and assembled a feared and ferocious army and navy. As in all armed forces, the rank-and-file soldier is the backbone of any unit; and this was especially important to the Military leaders. Thus, the education and training of the soldier was paramount to the success of any conflict and the Japanese soldier would excel at his duty. How this was accomplished is a subject that requires further investigation and analysis; as the IJA conscript endured intensive and often brutal treatment during their military training. They were trained in the hardest school.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See Drea, *Service of the Emperor*, Chapter 6. The term “trained in the hardest school” was taken Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* “There is no need to suppose that human beings differ very much from one another: but it is true that the ones who come out on top are the ones who have been trained in the hardest school.”

## **Chapter 2: The Fighting Chrysanthemum:**

### **The Education and Training of the Japanese Soldier**

“The Japanese soldier of World War II was a tough, tenacious and resourceful fighter”<sup>76</sup> and was the result of an intensive conventional and unconventional training period. Like the western armies, the soldier was trained in infantry tactics and weapons instruction, ostensibly to be developed into a trained killer. Unlike the western soldier, the Japanese military infused into its training some unconventional methods of developing the mindset of conscript. "Japanese soldiers were taught to value such personal qualities as allegiance to the Emperor, self-sacrifice and deprivation, faith, trust in both officers and fellow soldiers; and uprightness, thriftiness, valor, frugality, honor and a highly developed sense of shame."<sup>77</sup> It was vital that the mindset of the soldier was instilled with a warrior's overriding need to win. These tenets were initially instilled during the soldier's primary and secondary education. Upon conscription into the Army, the recruit was expected to have been sufficiently imbued with this propaganda which was further imparted during their training. These precepts were formed through the infusion of Shinto laws into the ancient “Way of the Warrior”, or commonly known as Bushido. Thus the Japanese soldier's indoctrination was heavily influenced by bushido and Shinto, which began during his primary education, continued through his training and manifested into the brutality exhibited in the field of combat and occupation.

Shintoism is a belief system that has its foundation in Chinese mysticism that was conveyed through the worship of a higher deity. The Japanese adopted a more spiritual sense of this “religion” in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century as a means to dictate day-to-day life. It soon gained a popular following in the ancient clans as means to demand strict loyalty to the chief shogunate; as he

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<sup>76</sup> Daugherty, *Fighting Techniques*, 7

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 9

presented himself as the “higher deity”.<sup>78</sup> As a result, the Masters bestowed upon their warrior class-the samurai- as the guardians of Shinto. The samurai, at that time, were considered the gentry of Japan and were the keystone to protecting the splintered shogunate territories. Thus, with such a high hierarchal status within Japanese society, Shinto over the next millennia, evolved into a belief system that instilled a sense of spiritual superiority that had not been apparent centuries earlier. As the samurai reached its apex as the defenders of the Japanese shogunate, and by extension, Japanese culture, as sentinels of Shinto it was believed that Japan had a patriotic common cause within Shinto; as it was becoming more of a creed rather than a religion.<sup>79</sup>

During the Meiji Restoration, Shintoism was adopted by the state as the established religion for political purposes. Buddhism, as a religion, had been favored by the shogunate and their warrior class, while Shintoism was now being considered the religion of the Emperor, who was trying to unite the nation as a monolithic, yet collective populace. Buddhism, in its simplicity could not fulfill the prospects of uniting a nation whereas Shintoism when infused with Imperial deity and zealous protection of the throne was far more affable and accepting to those reformers who wished to unite the nation under one Emperor.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Shinto philosophy was incorporated into the emperor ideology. Since Shinto had no formulated concrete doctrines and was completely bereft of any sacred texts, the emperor ideologues were able to absorb a vast range of tenets that served to strengthen the imperial cult of obedience.<sup>81</sup> As the emperor ideology strengthened throughout the early twentieth century, Shinto became associated “with a range of political ideas and attitudes, some of which are, from a rational standpoint,

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<sup>78</sup> Fellers, *Psychology*, 7

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>80</sup> Cobbold, *Religion in Japan*, 23.

<sup>81</sup> Yuki Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 204.

contradictory or incompatible. Therefore, the emperor ideology had a tendency toward totalitarianism from the beginning, but this tendency is veiled with mysticism, and as a result the illusory concept of the harmony of nation was established.”<sup>82</sup> In essence, Shinto was used to further indoctrinate emperor ideology as a mystic religion and at the expense of individualism. It also was utilized, under the guise of imperial obedience, as a tool to imbue Japanese culture as nation of racial superiority and spiritual purity.<sup>83</sup>

“To speak accurately, it is not so much a religion as patriotism exulted to the rank of the creed.”<sup>84</sup> It evolved into an institutional propaganda tool to venerate the country’s heroes and benefactors of every age, legendary and historical, ancient and more recent; the spirits of those being appealed to for protection. It was interwoven with a fundamental characteristic of worshipping the forces of nature; that is within the spiritual context of emperor ideology.<sup>85</sup> It gained a tremendous influence and following in the rural areas, where the majority of conscripts would be drafted, so its efficacy in imbuing these future soldiers was invaluable. It became a way of life, a spiritual journey that, in effect, idolized the Emperor; as he was the Chief Priest of Shinto. Although this was a creation that had commenced during the Meiji Era, it was strictly adhered by the much of Japanese society and the military during the Showa reign.<sup>86</sup>

The Meiji government effectively marginalized Buddhism as the unofficial state religion, and replaced it with Shinto tenets, which essentially had been rewritten, reconstituted with precepts that simply did not exist in the early forms. Obedience to the Emperor, racial superiority, spiritual superiority, and reverence to the Imperial throne, a chain unbroken in nearly

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Cobbold, *Religion in Japan*, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Wetzler, *Hirohito and War*, 95-7.

twenty-six hundred years were the basis of Shinto tenants. Individual intellectual discourse was discounted, often dismissed and discouraged, and as the further indoctrination of the Japanese populace took place through the early 20th century, any individualism, whether written or spoken, was usually met with derision, arrest, and sometimes torture or death. Meiji military leaders seized upon this opportunity to infuse these precepts within the educational infrastructure, military training, and also melded into bushido code. However, the bushido of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century bore no resemblance to original unwritten bushido that dictated the samurai's "Way of the Warrior".

Within Japan's cultural history and heritage there is not a more powerful image than that of the legend of the samurai and its sacred bushido code. Although popular culture lionized this honorable code, for those that fought in the Pacific War, its legacy, and that of the samurai, has a far more sinister side. The samurai tradition has often been cited as a source of the mindset that launched Japan's war against Southeast Asia and the United States, and also considered a psychological influence in the treatment of combatants and noncombatants. Specifically, bushido, often referred to as "Way of the Warrior", had since been relegated to the ancient precept in which the IJA soldier was imbued and was a psychological norm for committing atrocities.<sup>87</sup> It was believed to have existed on higher psychological plane rather than a simple army doctrine. It was considered more of an ideal or faith, the key to life or death, which was regularly connected to virtually all military training of both conscripts and officers. However, the truth of the bushido lies elsewhere, as it was complete remanufactured by the military elites to fit its purposes for the modern Imperial Army.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Friday, "Bushido", 339.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 340.

Bushido is often associated with the basic maxim that a true warrior was not only willing to risk his life when called upon, but actually looked forward to the opportunity to sacrifice himself for his master. Further, death was something not to be avoided, but it was to be devoutly adhered to in service to the Shogun. “But, however central to the willingness to die might have been to twentieth century notions of bushido, it takes a considerable leap of faith to connect this sort of philosophy with the actual behavior of the medial samurai.”<sup>89</sup> Historian Karl Friday claims it is terribly difficult to find ample examples of warriors who chose to die heroically rather than be killed in the act of retreat. However, this was certainly not terribly different than any other medieval Army, as retreat with specifically seen as a form of cowardice.<sup>90</sup>

Another popular theme is the fact that bushido demanded that samurai have an unconditional and utterly selfless loyalty to the ruling shogunate. However, during the era of medieval feudal systems in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, this type of loyalty was far different than that taught in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The loyalty their subjects owed to the rulers was a basic principle of Confucianism which derives little value from military tradition. Further, selfless displays by warriors were conspicuously missing in the Japanese historical record from medieval times. In fact, this loyalty was actually based on a contract of mutual interest and advantage, and heavily influenced by the demands of the self-interest of the samurai, in terms of employment, compensation and pensions.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, this loyalty was based solely on what some may refer to as modern business contracts and not mercenary militaristic contracts with rogue nations.

Bushido was rarely used in the context of warrior behavior until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, in which the modern Japanese Army was beginning to form around the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.,342.



nucleus of an Emperor-led nation, and as the samurai disappeared from the ruling elites in the military, it was believed that the bushido code could now be shared by the Imperial soldiers. Thus the term “bushido” was now openly used for all military training. Its infusion can be traced back to the Ministry of War’s 1871 edict to its imperial soldiers. It included the seven basic elements of bushido: loyalty, decorum, faith, obedience, courage, frugality and honor. These were true to the real character of Bushido, although they had never been documented. In fact, the word had been so rarely used that a Japanese historian/author, Nitobe Inazo,<sup>92</sup> published a book that explained and popularized the idea of bushido in both Japan and the West.<sup>93</sup> He had done so, according to his book, to explain how the sacred code was a spiritual element to the Japanese warrior that had no match in the Western world. But it was done so with an elegance that explained bushido as a pure and spiritual facet to one’s life, a life led by these virtues that were ordained within the life of the warrior. This was the true concept and intellectual element of the ancient bushido that was essentially adhered until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. With the full cooperation of former samurai and the Meiji military leaders, it would witness a complete overhaul that distorted bushido’s true meaning and transform it into a code of death.

Bushido, in its purest sense, does not justify cruelty. Its seven essential elements do not add up to any type of madness of atrocities committed by the Japanese Army during World War II. For instance, courage was inclusive of dying for a cause in the highest honor. Dying for trivial cause was equally despised and looked down upon. However, during World War II, courage was considered an indomitable spirit in the face of any adversity, including the butchering of helpless

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<sup>92</sup> See Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*. (Tokyo: Teibi Publishing Co.,1908) Accessed July 19, 2014. <https://ia902306.us.archive.org/6/items/bushidothesoulof014620mbp/bushidothesoulof014620mbp.pdf>. Internet Archive Digital Library

<sup>93</sup> Friday, “Bushido”, 340.

combatants, and also dying to the honor of the Emperor.<sup>94</sup> Further, the original bushido required great self-discipline and great tolerance and compassion towards others. Following the Russo-Japanese War, soldiers did not show the desired discipline their leaders had expected. Thus, it was decided that bushido needed to be further re-defined with increased Shinto influence and the inclusion of *kokutai*-the national polity of Imperial Japan. “Fighting spirit” was heavily emphasized within the framework of practicing bushido; especially in combat. Since most of the conscripts had little or no interaction with bushido, outside of their respective educations, they had little affinity to its ancient roots or honor code. Hence, most soldiers were only aware of a military code of honor and death that was thoroughly ensconced in the modern bushido.

Modern or military bushido thus was closely tied to the ideal of *kokutai*; a national structure maintained within the cult of the Emperor. It was manipulated into propaganda tool and purposely shaped and manufactured as part of an effort to build a unified modern nation out of an ancient feudal society. Yet, its main premise focused entirely on emperor ideology. “The greatest single corruption to bushido was in the demand for blind loyalty to the Emperor”<sup>95</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century bushido values had been transformed into a code of punishment, cruelty and brutality rather than the benevolent and honorable convention of its ancient warriors. The ancient code had nothing of militaristic value to the modern Japanese Army; hence its leaders completely distorted its true value with draconian commands that arguably had little connection with its origins.

The military had embraced the Imperial way of spiritual power and mysticism, along with the Shinto concepts of racial purity and diffused these ideals into the Bushido that became part of

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<sup>94</sup> Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors*, 211.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

the Japanese soldier's training. The noble qualities of the early modern Japanese soldier had been exploited and manipulated to the fore of the training of recruits who were to embark into battle in the late 1930's and throughout the Pacific War. A manufactured and distorted bushido was now guiding the IJA. It stressed national spirit, self-sacrifice, loyalty, justice, and other modest principles. However, there was no stipulation that the code would be granted to one's enemies. In fact, the Japanese general staff and high command believed that the code should be enforced only from the Japanese standpoint, and at no time was it to be afforded to the enemy combatant and non-combatant alike.<sup>96</sup> Thus, bushido was believed to be the catalyst behind many of the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers during the Asia Pacific War. While there is certainly an ample amount of truth to this, modern bushido was not the sole factor that impelled soldiers to commit these murderous crimes. The conscript's indoctrination had begun long before any military training, as the military had effectively commandeered the Japanese education structure through a slow and methodical process that began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

After the Russo-Japanese war, militarism was methodically suffused into the Japanese educational infrastructure. War and patriotism were stressed in virtually every subject within the curriculum. Subjects ranging from language classes to math classes all contained elements of militarism that had been intertwined to further indoctrinate students of the efficacy of Japan's unity of the nation, and the abject importance of an Emperor's Army. By the time World War I had commenced, military training was brought directly into the primary schools. It was believed by IJA ministers that an increased militaristic curriculum would sufficiently increase an aggressive mentality; that assuredly would result in a higher rate of conscription, and lower preparatory times to train a soldier. A commission on education passed a resolution in 1917 that

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<sup>96</sup> Daugherty, *Fighting Techniques*, 31.

essentially encouraged military training in the schools. Its intention was to create a strong and healthy student by improving his physical training and to develop the knowledge and skills needed in military matters and also cultivate loyalty by military discipline. This would lay the foundation for future military training as an essential element of education in Japan that simply could not be overlooked.<sup>97</sup> “Even elementary schools, renamed National Schools, were assigned the crucial task of creating ‘children of the Emperor’, willing to ‘sacrifice themselves’ for the sake of the nation”<sup>98</sup>. Each school was provided a quota for graduates to enter into various military academies. As the school was further militarized, the faculty was increasingly dominated by military reservists and recently commissioned officers.<sup>99</sup>

This new educational curriculum was fundamental in its assertion to the spirit of the military’s absolute obedience to authority. In order to maintain this curriculum, active duty military officers were assigned to every school from the middle school level up as military training became part of the regular curriculum. By 1925, all schools were using training centers that were established in virtually every rural city and village as part of a four-year program that required four-hundred hours of military education for all males whose formal education had ended at the elementary school level. It is not without some coincidence that this started during the Taisho era’s last years-which many claim that he was mentally and physically unable to rule, and continued accelerating during the Showa era. “Children continued to be taught the foundation myths: that they were the subjects of the Emperor and had to obey him just as they obeyed their mothers and fathers. But for the first time the impersonal Emperor-state was

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<sup>97</sup> Ienaga, *Pacific War*, 27.

<sup>98</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F., *Japan at War: An Oral History*. (New York: The New Press, 1992), 172

<sup>99</sup> See SOPAC : Extracts of Interrogations of Japanese POWs. “Prisoner of War Interrogation Report # 343” and “350”, RG 165, Box 916. Interrogations of many Japanese POW’s attest to the significance of their respective primary and compulsory education. All testimonies are similar in their description of their childhood and teenage educations.

presented as a supreme entity that took priority over all other values... The premises of monarchical absolutism had been written into public education and, state power had, in theory, been grounded into the intimate sphere of the family”<sup>100</sup> Racial purity was also part of Japan's national consciousness, as it was now coming to the forefront as part of a cultural war against Western influence. Japanese soldiers later recounted they had the privilege of being indoctrinated with *Yamato damashii* that a westerner, particularly Americans, lacked due to their materialism and monetary decadence.<sup>101</sup> This type of anti-American dogma would have far reaching effects during the Pacific War.

By the late 1930s, the Ministry of Education had accelerated its efforts to further the nation's spiritual mobilization for a possible protracted war. It was producing propaganda devices that were critical to the national curricula and its students. This was simply a discourse on the *kokutai* and obedience to the the Emperor's ideological and spiritual role. These devices emphasized the distinctiveness of Japanese culture, extolling the bright, pure and selfless heart of the Japanese while counter-posing the *kokutai* to modern Western individualism; stressing the absolute superiority of the Japanese people and state over all nations.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, seventeen and eighteen-year old student were eligible to apply to become reserve officers as a result of their military training received in both primary and secondary schools. Many of the secondary schools were, in fact, de-facto military academies, many of which were created as the war in China extended. Many middle school graduates were forced to apply to be reserve officers as a result of the military training they had received. After finishing high school, almost all of these reserve

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<sup>100</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 32

<sup>101</sup> U. S. Office of War Information, New Delhi: “Prisoner of War Interrogation at Delhi.” 13 January 1944, RG 165, Box 915. NARA.

<sup>102</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 313.

officers were drafted and then received approximately two years of training and then commissioned as an infantry officer in the Imperial Japanese Army.

As the Second Sino-Chinese War raged, the Japanese education system had become regimented and robotic.<sup>103</sup> School exercises were nothing short of nationalistic military exercises to display the discipline and order that the schools had impelled upon its students. This was not without military type discipline in the classroom as students were often subjected to slaps, pummeled by fists, or even being bludgeoned with bamboo sticks. The pressure to conform to authority intensified even further if a schoolboy decided that he wanted to become a soldier; which was often the case. Nevertheless, within the school system, obedience was touted as a supreme virtue and any sense of individualism was replaced by the dogma of a collective consciousness that belong to a larger monolithic entity to protect *kokutai*.<sup>104</sup> After nearly thirty years of militaristic inculcation, the Japanese civilian, primarily the student, was a willing and ready recruit insisting that he take part in the defense of the Imperial throne, even at the expense of his own life. However, the last step or process- basic and advanced military training- was still to be achieved. It was there, in the barracks, the soldier was further indoctrinated; often under the most brutal conditions.

For the Japanese soldier, the bushido code instilled during training demanded complete obedience to the Emperor, and above all else, his duty “was to fight and, if necessary, die for the Emperor...their country and the honor of his [family].”<sup>105</sup> This fanaticism had found its way into the concept of blind obedience to orders. Constant drilling of nationalistic ideology by the soldier’s superior officers had made “human cattle out of each of them. [No recruit] dared to

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<sup>103</sup> Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: Penguin Book), 31.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Daugherty, *Fighting Techniques*, 12.

question orders, to doubt authority, to do anything but immediately carry out all commands of [their] superiors. [The soldiers] were automatons who obeyed without thinking.”<sup>106</sup> Any refusal to disobey orders was constituted as grave violation of bushido and given the cultural dishonor of such a breach, it was tantamount to dishonoring the Emperor and his subjects. In short, no soldier dared to contravene the bushido code lest they suffer the consequences of dishonor to himself, his family and his country. It simply was never considered nor was within the pathology of the soldier.

Strict discipline, obedience, and spiritual instruction were vital to military training. Conformity and subservience to authority were demanded from all recruits; as they quickly learned they were at the bottom of the military hierarchy. This, of course, was not unusual within most military basic training structures, but the IJA was insistent that the conscript had to endure much more than verbal abuse or standard punishments (i.e. western-style discipline). A rather unconventional style of physical abuse was a common and widespread practice at boot camp, advanced training and extended in the field of combat. This practice was considered an essential part of creating the exemplary Imperial soldier. “The belief existed that there was no conceivable limit to what a Japanese recruit was capable of doing if properly motivated.”<sup>107</sup>

The training was grueling and included the endurance of unfathomable hardships that were used to train the soldier to bear depravation beyond normal human limits. Discipline was strict, especially within the barracks. It was here that the soldiers formed their familiar clanships within their units. They shared their hardships and the “joys” of training and regaled yarns of their home life.<sup>108</sup> Yet, the barracks life was also the venue of numerous occurrences of abuse

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>108</sup> Drea, *Service of the Emperor*, 27.

that the conscript faced at the hand of his superiors. Recruits were often forced to perform the most menial of tasks at the request of their officers. Often, recruits were forced run a gauntlet between tables while sticks, shoes and manuals were pelted at them to inflict pain. However the “most common abuse was the liberal use of the fist. On the first day, the NCO-in-charge of the squad lined the recruits up and ordered them to stand spread legged for balance, remove their eyeglasses, and clamp their mouths shut. He went down the line punching each in the face.”<sup>109</sup> Officers were also known for their swift and violent response to the slightest of offenses, often at that end of a rifle or bamboo stick. Worst of all was the use of worn out marching shoes with the hobnail's protruding from the bottom. Offenders were often slapped in the face, leaving scars on recruits, and other times, comrades sported swollen, cut, and bruised faces. Captured soldiers recalled these abusive practices as matter of pride or even expectation. “Discipline...was strict and the officers were quick to show displeasure at any infraction of rules.”<sup>110</sup> Many were handcuffed and beaten with clubs or pipes; often replacing a lesser punishment of solitary confinement.<sup>111</sup> Despite this constant tantalizing of soldiers, morale remained high among the troops. The soldier often took this treatment in stride as one soldier remarked; “It was just the way of things.”<sup>112</sup>

Even though physical abuse of trainees was officially prohibited, it was never strictly enforced. The abuse of recruits was systematically institutionalized illegally. The Military Police (*kempeitai*) and military authorities were notorious for their egregious behavior towards recruits. Stories of arrests, detention, and torture were notorious. Military judges pretended or ignored evidence of such brutality as many of them certainly were not going to call attention to abuse of

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<sup>109</sup> Rottman, *Japanese Infantrymen*, 27

<sup>110</sup> Navy Department: Office of The Chief of Naval Operations, Washington. DC. “Report On the Interrogation of Survivors from the Japanese Destroyer Matsu, Sunk for August 1944. 11 June 1945, RG 165, Box 914. NARA.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Rottman, *Japanese Infantrymen*, 27.



training, as it might be conceived as undermining military doctrine.<sup>113</sup> “Cruelty toward subordinates was a psychological technique. It provided an outlet for pressure by allowing each rank to shift the oppression to the one below.”<sup>114</sup> Officers were not immune from such treatment as well, as many endured those same abuses that they had impelled upon the conscripts. Hence, the abuse simply steamrolled through the ranks until it was beset upon the lowest recruit, which they had no outlet to ameliorate any tension or aggravation. Military leaders believed that this was the only way to train troops to fight against a superior (Allied) army technology, but also an inferior spiritual *élan*. It proved to be quite effective until the latter years of the Pacific war.

In essence, the Japanese military believed that abusing its recruits would cause a strict resentment against superiors which they believed would be converted into fighting strength. Further they believed that this type of training would instill a bloodthirsty desire to slaughter their enemy, and also mold them into a fierce fighting unit to hold off a possible superior enemy with its attendant firepower. The Japanese soldier was heir, the high command insisted, to a martial tradition that made him an invincible opponent. Fighting spirit and *élan* were considered a military advantage, and one which was relied upon to compensate for deficiencies in weaponry; which would require an even greater sacrifice in combat.<sup>115</sup> “The Japanese soldier was required to display qualities that every Army covertly [hoped] for, even expected.”<sup>116</sup> From the military’s perspective, the most vital and indispensable quality of the Japanese soldier was his willingness to die, which removed all limits on what his leaders could attempt. “As the war

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<sup>113</sup> Ienaga, *Pacific War*, 51.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>115</sup> Harries, *Soldiers*, 323.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

progressed acceptance of death became even more heavily stressed – just as it was ever more necessary.”<sup>117</sup>

The Japanese were going into battle not with the idea of glory or death, but with the explicit belief of glory and death. Such an attitude had decided advantages as it allowed the Emperor’s soldiers to close the enemy imbued with their fighting spirit (*Yamato damashii*) of offense and mobility.<sup>118</sup> Their high sense of patriotism and respect for absolute obedience and discipline had certainly been achieved through, in many cases, inhumane means. However, it demanded the unquestionable loyalty to the Emperor and the national cause. This coalesced into a remarkable cohesion within all units that enabled the IJA to achieve an incredible level of efficiency and conquest during the Asian-Pacific War. Japanese soldiers had been properly imbued to the cause of the Japanese policy of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Within this dogma, soldiers “fought for their country, to save the country in the national emergency. They believed that the country was in a serious situation, on the brink of survival in the face of the foreign invasion. It was natural at the time that the younger generation should go out and fight for such a national emergency.”<sup>119</sup> Despite being subjected to constant abuse and outright cruelty, both officers and conscripts ably adjusted and accepted these methods as their duty to their Emperor, their people, their family and lastly, themselves.

Yet, this hard training paid off. Although outnumbered, and sometimes under powered, the Japanese Army proved to be well prepared and hardened for the attack at the beginning of the Pacific War. “The Japanese...went to war against America the way they trained. They relied on the grueling, demanding training that produced quality infantrymen to compensate for the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Fellers, *Psychology*, 16.

<sup>119</sup> Kazuo Tamayama and John Nunneley, *Tales by Japanese Soldiers* (London: Orion Books, 1992), 156.

inferior material and technological support...It was this combination of obedience and ferocity that made the Japanese Army, whatever its condition, so formidable, and which would make any army formidable.”<sup>120</sup> Yet, it was these same attributes that would serve the Japanese soldier in committing inhumane atrocities against his enemy. Further, Japanese policy regarding surrender and prisoners of war provided the Japanese soldier a platform to commit these crimes against humanity.

The IJA soldier was instilled with a no-surrender mentality during his basic training. Based on his devotion to the Emperor, he would give his life under any circumstance to protect and honor *kokutai*. Surrender was equal to treason and dishonor to the Imperial Throne and the soldier's family. However, the concept of no-surrender went beyond the ideals of honor to the crown. The Japanese nation had strictly adhered to the precepts of Shintoism regarding racial purity. Quite naturally this belief system was reinforced during training, as the soldier truly believed it was beneath his dignity to surrender to sub-humans such as Caucasians, Chinese and other Asian races. Any surrender was a complete separation from the soldier and his family, nation and the Emperor. As far as a soldier was concerned, he himself was now a subhuman and a coward. This was blatantly clear from the testimony of Japanese POW's captured throughout the Pacific Theatre. Almost all POW's expressed their desire to commit suicide rather than endure the dishonor of capture. Nearly all asserted that they believed that they had brought dishonor to the Emperor, his comrades and his family. All requested that no notification be sent to their families as they feared that their relatives would be the recipients of great dishonor and being ostracized by their community. Further, most captured soldiers explained that they had no intention to return to Japan after the war as they could not face the consequences of the stain of

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<sup>120</sup> Drea, *Service of the Emperor*, 73.

POW status.<sup>121</sup> So embedded was this belief, that a mass suicide occurred within an American POW camp in the Pacific; ostensibly to honor their duty to the Emperor and spare the POW and his family from complete disgrace.<sup>122</sup>

Thus, Japanese soldiers continued to fight against all odds, as surrender represented defeat. Defeatism was not within the lexicon of the Japanese soldier, and was considered a taboo subject that was never to be discussed. Faced with the possibility of such a foreign notion, the soldier would fight to the death, especially in the last months of the war, rather than concede defeat. “[It] meant a willingness to sacrifice oneself in a fatal attack that might result in the death of only one enemy soldier. And, if necessary committing suicide to prevent capture.”<sup>123</sup> It is within this circumstance, that it is understandable the IJA soldier remained unpredictable in tactics other than no-surrender. But the no-surrender policy had far more reaching consequences than fanatical and suicidal soldiers; it deeply affected the policy toward POW’s and their attendant treatment.

The brutalization of POWs was decided by the Japanese Army general staff, although it was certainly a legacy within the Officer corps since the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>124</sup>. It was their policy that afforded the despicable conditions in the camps throughout the Pacific area. Junior officers and the rank-and-file prison guards simply carried out orders without question. Imbued with a perverted bushido code and the intractable obedience to all orders-due to the concept that any order received essentially came from the Emperor, Allied POWs were subject to some of the

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<sup>121</sup> See “Psychological Warfare: S.E.A.T.I.C. Interrogation Bulletin No.2”, 30 November 1944,” RG 165 Box 915, and SOPAC: Extracts of Interrogations of Japanese POWs, “Prisoner of War Interrogation Report # 297” 1 June 1944. and “Interrogation Report No 737. 27 May 45, RG 165, Box 916, NARA.

<sup>122</sup> “Report of Investigation: Suicide Pact at prisoner camp APO 502, 22 January 1944. Records of the Provost Marshal General: Daily Report of Japanese POW interrogations, Record Group 389, Box 8, NARA.

<sup>123</sup> Rottman, *Japanese Infantrymen.*, 32

<sup>124</sup> Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors*, 167.

worst criminal behavior in the history of war. The mindset of the IJA soldier also played a large part of this behavior. Since surrender was unacceptable within Japanese military culture-lest one suffer the consequences, POW's were ascertained to be cowards and without any honor. Combined with a sense of racial superiority, POW's were considered sub-human and worthy of any maltreatment at the hands of a dispassionate culture.

Even though Japan had signed both The Hague and Geneva Conventions agreements, she chose to ignore both. Speciously claiming the Geneva accords were never ratified in Japan, the government chose to label the agreements as a coward's code.<sup>125</sup> Thus, Allied capitulation was considered corrupt and contemptible; worthy of the brutal treatment they received. Japan considered the Geneva conditions as a tool for Western democracies and had no place in Japanese military culture. The military believed that the treatment of POW's, as proclaimed by the articles, was too lenient and could not possibly be implemented because the Emperor's soldiers would never allow themselves to become prisoners of war.<sup>126</sup>

Japan's rejection of the Geneva articles and developing its own policy came into full force following the 1937 Chinese incursion. Staff officers were notified to stop using the term "prisoner of war" and consider all enemy combatants and non-combatants essentially as guerillas or disobedient subjects of the empire.<sup>127</sup> "Throughout the war in China, the Japanese military captured tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers annually. Yet, at war's end, when Japanese authorities claimed to have in their possession scores of thousands of Western prisoners, they acknowledged having only fifty-six Chinese prisoners of war."<sup>128</sup> This disdain for the enemy would permeate all ranks of the Japanese Army and conspired with the training of foot-soldiers

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<sup>125</sup> Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army*, 158

<sup>126</sup> Friday, "Bushido", 348

<sup>127</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 360

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 24

and officers alike to impel these loyal subjects of the Emperor to commit some of the most heinous atrocities in the history of war.

In China, and later in the Pacific War, “the Japanese Army made no distinction between combatants and civilians, meting out severe punishment to noncombatants whom they suspected of participating in the People's resistance movements and guerilla activities in China and elsewhere, on the grounds that these constituted acts of hostility towards Japan... The crews of American warplanes taken prisoner by the Japanese Army during the Pacific war were frequently summarily executed”<sup>129</sup> Too often senior Japanese officers ordered that execution of prisoners and civilians, the destruction of villages and cities, and condoned or encouraged plundering and rape. Junior officers followed orders and then the enlisted ranks followed the permissive lead and vented their frustration and anger on the helpless. Nanking was victim of this nefarious, yet unofficial policy; although the “rape” was never ordered by IGHQ. Standing orders to take no prisoners were in place at that time and the IJA occupiers ruthlessly applied them.<sup>130</sup> The Japanese began to execute all POWs and unarmed deserters who had surrendered. The resulting slaughter continued in the surrounding villages three months following the end of battle, and continued throughout the war. As war spread into the South Pacific, logistics and desperation would serve to further exacerbate the fanatical mindset of the beleaguered IJA soldier.<sup>131</sup>

"No war atrocity has a single cause. The nature of the individual perpetrator, the ethics of society and the ethos of military organization from which he comes, the aims of the campaign in which he is involved, the state of the war and of the soldier himself at the moment of committing

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<sup>129</sup> Chang and Barker. “Japan’s Amnesia”. 69

<sup>130</sup> Chang, *Nanking*, 215-217.

<sup>131</sup> See Edward Drea, “The Seldom-Seen Enemy,” *Naval History* Vol. 24 Iss. 2 (Apr 2010): 22-25. Drea argues that Japan’s vast expanse greatly hampered its logistics and supply. As a result, as the war proceeded, the Japanese soldier endured great depravity which, Drea postulates, added to the desperation and fanaticism that resulted in further atrocities.

the crime – all play their part.”<sup>132</sup> In essence, the roots of war atrocities began at an early age within Japanese society. It started in the education system, made its way into the Imperial edicts for which the Japanese people were to follow without question, manipulated by the militarists who melded Shintoism into the bushido code, imbuing it into conscripts during training, and then executed in the field of battle. Not too surprisingly Japanese war criminals rarely expressed guilt or even regret; sometimes it seemed they saw nothing wrong in what they and their comrades had done.<sup>133</sup> “The Japanese soldier admitted no higher authority than the Empire, represented in practical terms by superior officers. His only criteria for action were the decrees of the Emperor and the collective will of those groups to which the soldier belonged – his family, village, and his unit.”<sup>134</sup>

“The atrocities committed by the Imperial Japanese Army are impossible to catalog. The number and the hideous variety of crimes defy even the most twisted imagination: murder on a scale amounting to genocide; rates beyond counting; vivisection; cannibalism; torture; American prisoners of war allowed to drown in excrement in the hell ships taking them back to Japan for use as forced labor; civilian prisoners used as human sandbags during air raids.”<sup>135</sup> Japan’s cruelty had no bounds. It was entirely accepted behavior within all ranks of the army. This is illustrated by the illegal and incomprehensible use of “Comfort Women”-mostly Korean and Chinese civilians; most under the threat of death. The Nanking Massacre is now largely acknowledged as one of the worst atrocities committed by the IJA. Further, while 4 percent of POW’s died in German custody, nearly 27 percent of Allied POW’s died at the hands of their

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<sup>132</sup> Harries, *Soldiers*, 477

<sup>133</sup> Tamayama and Nunneley, *Tales*, 419.

<sup>134</sup> Harries, *Soldiers*, 478.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 476

Japanese captors; many resulting from beatings and starvation.<sup>136</sup> Yet not one senior commander ever ordered a cessation of these crimes. No military ministry or any imperial representative ever attempted to address the crimes committed in its name. The IGHQ propagandized the atrocities into psychological warfare against the Western Allies, foolishly believing that this would somehow debilitate the will to fight when it actually emboldened them to fight even harder; and with a severe vengeance now rearing its ugly head amongst Allied troops.

But the question of “why” still evades many western historians and philosophers. Edward Drea , for one, ponders that “[one] must wonder why up to the very last moment the Japanese insisted on leaving these bloody trophies skewed to trees for their comrades to discover. Did they expect to terrify the American G.I. or Australian digger? Was it incomprehension that anyone would willingly be taken prisoner? Was it barbarism? Whatever it was, the Japanese record of rapine, pillage, and murder across Southwest Asia remains a bitter legacy.”<sup>137</sup> This wonderment is not at all perplexing. The Army was nothing more than a natural extension of prewar Japanese cultures, “with all the trappings of respect for hierarchy and group versus individual identification implied in that notion. There [was] a highly positive and flattering image of the life of a common Japanese soldier. Service to the Emperor was considered the pinnacle to the Japanese civilian.”<sup>138</sup> Yet, this imperial cult, the fanatical devotion to all things imperial, the ravaging of enemy combatants and non-combatants suddenly and shockingly- for the Japanese- ended on August 15, 1945. The time had come for justice and punishment. For millions of Japanese caught up in a great national effort, who supported the war for the sake of the state, the

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<sup>136</sup>Laurence Rees, *Horrors in the East: The Brutal Struggle in Asia and the Pacific in WWII* (London: BBC Books, 2001), 149-150.

<sup>137</sup> Drea, *Service of the Emperor*, 108.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 78



Emperor and their sons, were left with a deep sense of abandonment<sup>139</sup>. However, the question of responsibility and culpability would soon be under the charge of the Allied justice system. For the IJA soldier, he simply went home without any thought to his or any of his compatriots' behavior during the war. To them, they fought for a noble and honorable cause and now wished to simply live out their lives. Unfortunately for them, and other military, political and imperial figures, the time of truth would descend upon a closed militaristic society and expose the genocidal policies that had pervaded during the war. Truth, however, would soon be abrogated as a relative concept, as would responsibility and culpability of Imperial Japan's behavior during the Asian-Pacific War.

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<sup>139</sup> Cook and Cook, *Japan at War*, 405.

## Chapter 3

### The Shadow Chrysanthemum: The Cleansing of Culpability

The International Military Tribunal Far East (IMTFE) was established to bring to justice those responsible for the various crimes committed during the Asian-Pacific War. Indeed there were numerous arrests, trials and convictions; along with the execution of the highest classification of war criminals. The Allies had a very simple method of classifying war criminals. There were major criminals (Class A): which consisted of military and political leaders who were accused of conspiracy to wage aggressive war, and then there were minor criminals (Class B & C): soldiers accused of murder, rape, torture, and looting. For the minor crimes, the trials were set to be in Japan or within the territory of each Allied nation where evidence had been accumulating since the beginning of the war. Although the list of potential defendants was incredibly long, approximately six-thousand Japanese were brought to trial.<sup>140</sup> Many escaped because the people responsible for locating and arresting the perpetrators were actually implicated in war crimes themselves. Therefore, they simply disappeared from Allied eyes and assimilated back into Japanese society. Others were given immunity in exchange for secret information on other criminals or Japanese military secrets; especially those regarding unit 731's research.<sup>141</sup> Nonetheless, the IMTFE, under the direction of an international charter, similar to that of Nuremburg, set out to bring justice to the now defeated Japanese nation and for its

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<sup>140</sup> Harries, *Soldiers*, 462-4

<sup>141</sup> See, Sheldon H. Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945, and the American Cover-up* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Harris chronicles the gruesome biological experiments conducted on POW's and captured non-combatants. Harris concludes the U.S. provided immunity for Shiro Ishii, the commander of Unit 731 in exchange for all documented research that this "medical facility" performed on its victims. It is still largely marginalized today due to various political factors.

victims. This task, however, was fraught with constant scrutinization from not only the defendants, but also many of the Tribunal judges, prosecutors and Western legal experts.<sup>142</sup>

One of the major problems the IMTFE faced was the dearth of documented materials needed for a thorough and inscrutable prosecution. Between August 15 and September 2, 1945, the Japanese Cabinet ordered all ministries to destroy their records; orders that were soon extended to local government and military garrisons throughout Japan and its remaining empire. The Imperial Army tried to conceal its past, particularly its long record of atrocities throughout Asia.<sup>143</sup> Additionally, many outposts were ordered to exhume all POW gravesites, cremate the remains, and dispense with them at sea. This was a practice that had been widely used during the war, particularly on the islands that the Allied advance had bypassed.<sup>144</sup> Since these valuable sources were purposely destroyed, ostensibly to cloak any and all incrimination of an IJA soldier's responsibility in committing atrocities, the prosecution was forced to utilize other conventional and unconventional evidence. Captured documents, secret transcripts recovered by Allied intelligence-although rarely used for security purposes, and eyewitness testimony and affidavits were the most effective tools the prosecution used during the trials. However, there are inherent problems with these types of sources. They cannot be ascertained to be the absolute truth, as many of these men were considered to be Hirohito apologists or protectors of the Imperial Throne. Testimonies collected during the Tokyo trials were notoriously vague when

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<sup>142</sup> The issue of the outcome of the IMTFE trials and the subsequent San Francisco Peace Treaty (SPFT) has precipitated volumes of scholarship regarding the legal standing that both the trials and the treaty. Arguments range from a proper and solid adjudication to a victor's retribution against a defeated nation. For further reading see Maria Hsai Chang and Robert Barker's "Victors' Justice and Japan Amnesia" and Neil Boister and Robert Cryer, *The Tokyo International Military Tribunal: A Reappraisal* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>143</sup> Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army*, 260.

<sup>144</sup> A high profile of this practice is best described in Chester Hearn's *Sorties into Hell: The Human War on Chichi Jima* (Westport CT.: Praeger, 2003).

referencing Hirohito's culpability.<sup>145</sup> Personal diaries are also subject to different interpretations. Many of those retrieved during the occupation appear to shed some truth on the respective author's interaction during the war, but again, the veracity of the content certainly could not be considered unequivocal truth. Further, testimony from Allied POW's and victims of Japanese brutality was highly charged; as its consistency was always questioned. In sum, the IMTFE faced many herculean challenges in bringing to justice the accused war criminals. Yet, the success rate of conviction was extremely high and resulted in nearly 920 executions.<sup>146</sup> However, it is important to note the IMTFE did not exist as a singular court in Tokyo, where the "Class A" trials were held, but military tribunals were held in other venues across the Central Pacific that were largely ignored by the media and future scholars.<sup>147</sup> These trials concentrated on the "Class B & C" war criminals; those who participated and ordered the atrocities that so outraged the western Allies.

While the Tokyo crime trials would symbolize the Allied search for justice, it did not encompass all the judicial proceedings in the Pacific theater. Hundreds of postwar trials were held in the outlying area including Guam, Singapore and mainland China. These trials were of paramount importance to the Pacific Islanders who had been subjected to Japanese brutality during the Pacific War. Over the next thirty months, thousands of Japanese soldiers and officers were brought to trial for their personal behavior during the war. Real justice was being administered on Guam and the other islands to those who actually committed the crimes.

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<sup>145</sup> Large, *Emperor Hirohito*, 130.

<sup>146</sup> Richard H. Minear, *Victors' Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trials* (Ann Arbor: Center of Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2001), 6. Minear asserts that this number is highly contested in Japan and the formal Allied Nations. However, the exact number is superfluous within the context of convictions and sentences.

<sup>147</sup> Tim Maga, *Judgment at Tokyo: The Japanese War Crimes Trials* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 93.

The Guam trials emphasized and investigated the straightforward issues of murder, torture, and cannibalism as basic criminal acts subject to death penalties or life imprisonment. In short, the military tribunals in the outer islands were not beset with the technicalities of the international war crimes charter, overusing basic societal laws-including those of Japan, to prosecute these criminals. Guam prosecutors and investigators had been charged with investigating all the atrocities committed by the Japanese within its expanded Empire. Most of these trials relied primarily on what little documentation existed, eyewitness testimony, and circumstances and implications conveyed by the accused on the witness stand. As in Tokyo, this lack of sufficient evidence would have long lasting effects upon the accused. Notwithstanding the dearth of incriminating evidence, many used the oft convenient excuse of “following orders” or simply explained that they were victims themselves of a militaristic government policy of abuse. This defense was often used effectively as the U.S. Navy, which was in charge of the class B and C criminal trials, had “frowned on death sentences for those who took blame for the actions of their subordinates. A certain onus therefore rested on the shoulders of the prosecution to prove without a doubt that offenses were committed by the defendant himself ‘without the influence of any higher authority.’”<sup>148</sup>

Nonetheless, the basic problem for the Japanese defense lawyers- claiming that the perpetrators were simply following orders- was proving that IJA superiors bore the preponderance of responsibility. These superiors, NCO’s and officers alike, in turn testified they were just part of a military culture that was entirely culpable; thus their leaders were responsible. However, this hierarchy did not exist prior to the Pacific War and in fact the opposite was true. If the perpetrators had felt they were just only doing their job, then why did they destroy all the

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 97.

documents? Why were all the documents burned, victims cremated and then discarded? If the defendants' claims of innocence are based on a lack of evidence, it was they who had destroyed all the evidence. They certainly were aware that they were subject to war crimes, so one can easily infer that many these soldiers simply were trying to protect themselves from prosecution. While these questions were never resolved, the Class B & C trials did convict and execute hundreds of officers and soldiers; at least those who had been investigated arrested and tried. Throughout the trials, many of the defendants voraciously defended their actions and offered no apologies whatsoever. Others simply reverted back to the understanding that any soldier who surrenders deserves a horrible death.<sup>149</sup> As noted, they learned quickly to blame not only the military hierarchy and political system, but also attempted to exculpate their actions due to cultural differences; as though torture and murder were acceptable behavioral standards in Japanese society. Nonetheless, the final judgment against the Class B & C criminals simply disregarded nearly all these rather specious claims.

The same can be said of the repatriated soldiers who returned without any scrutiny from the IMTFE. There were many soldiers who likely participated or witnessed many of the atrocities that were never subject to the justice system. There is no doubt that countless IJA soldiers slipped through the cracks of justice while a scant few were dealt with by the IMTFE. However, through the use of combat diaries kept by many soldiers<sup>150</sup> and the publishing of Japanese oral histories sheds some evidence that most of them retained similar attitudes and

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 100-102.

<sup>150</sup> See Aaron William Moore, *Writing War: Soldiers Record The Japanese Empire* (London: Harvard University Press, 2103). Moore examines post war diaries within the context of subjective analyzation of the soldier's ability to discern between fact and fiction. However, it is clear that Moore's conclusions reveal more truth within the diaries than "fiction".

reflections on their role during the war.<sup>151</sup> Despite losing a war, many of the veterans rejected the idea that nothing good came out of the terrible war and the sacrifices made by the soldier. This, of course, led to many yarns about how a soldier who died in action without killing an enemy had a special place of honor for sacrificing his own life without taking the other. Some believed that the war was actually a “Good Defeat”.<sup>152</sup> This was and is solely based on post-war Japan’s new Constitution and its economic power base that resulted in from American insistence on a democratic society and a free-market economy. This argument is somewhat specious, as this was never the intention of the Imperial government until the surrender terms were signed. So the idea of the “Great Defeat” should be considered nothing more than a revisionist history of Japan’s actions during the Pacific War. The veterans simply did not wish to bring shame upon their families or comrades by introducing evidence or testimony that might possibly reveal the culpability of Japanese soldiers’ actions during the Asian-Pacific War. This, of course, was a matter of honor that is so important within a village, and community, that still remains a cultural facet of Japanese life.<sup>153</sup>

However, some of the diaries did reveal some aspects that most veterans would have avoided. For instance, some of the diaries from the Chinese expedition often exposed the brutality impelled upon Chinese troops. Many were beaten, pummeled with a stone, or sliced open with a sword as to expose to the common infantryman that Chinese soldiers did not deserve any better treatment. “First and foremost... such behavior was acceptable, right, and even plausible.”<sup>154</sup> In fact, many Japanese troops were commanded to kill any and all members of the

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<sup>151</sup> Theodore and Haruko Cook’s *Japan at War: An Oral History*, provides excellent examples of the travails the authors’ endured attempting to encourage Japanese veteran’s to reveal their personal recollections and attitudes about their service in the war. It proved to be a daunting, yet somewhat successful endeavor.

<sup>152</sup> Cook and Cook, *Japan at War*, 17-18.

<sup>153</sup> Matsumura, “State Propaganda”, 830-834.

<sup>154</sup> Moore, *Writing War*, 90.

Communist Army. Many of the Japanese servicemen who recorded these acts did not believe that they had acted with any inhumane behavior. In fact, many Japanese servicemen believed that these acts were simply commonplace and actually was building toward a personal transformation into a much more effective soldier.

Although many Japanese diarists did strain to describe the horrors of killing innocent civilians, many went through a great transformation from seeing these actions as the horrors of war to avenging his comrade's deaths. In short, the transformation from a sympathetic regard towards life into a normative persona of brutality was slowly taking place. Since the soldier had been trained in the midst of an inhumane and brutal atmosphere, it is more convincing to understand his actions as an achievement rather than an atrocity. As postwar diaries and recollections revealed, most Japanese were very indifferent to the atrocities committed, and simply refused to accept any culpability as they believed they were simply doing their jobs in service of the Empire.

It should be noted, however, that many of these diaries were discovered after the war had ended; some after as many as fifty years. Thus the possibility exists that the soldiers themselves doctored or edited the diaries to reflect a more sympathetic or antiseptic view of his experiences in combat, including those atrocities that he personally witnessed. Regardless of the writer's attempts to sanitize his own experiences, the diary still, in their purest sense, do reveal a certain truth to the Japanese soldier's actions in the field. Further, as discovered in post-war interrogations, many veterans did not want to unearth what they considered unpleasant subjects. It must be understood that to interview Japanese veterans who served during the Showa era, getting them to talk about or admit to the atrocities and brutality committed under the auspices of the Emperor's people, was considered heresy against the Emperor Hirohito; as he was still alive.



However after 1989, following the Emperor's death, many believed this was the moment to put the war behind them rather than to reflect on its meanings. In other words, the death of the Emperor signified the death of all collective memory of the Asian-Pacific war. It was as if the fifteen years war had never existed, except for the fact of the suffering the Japanese suffered under intense incendiary bombings and the subsequent atomic attacks. Thus, they became victims rather than victimizers; which would become a common mantra for the Japanese in the post-war years that would sustain the avoidance of responsibility and culpability of the war atrocities.<sup>155</sup>

Despite all the incontrovertible evidence and testimony exposed during the War Crime trials, most soldiers adhered to the policy of passing the culpability of the atrocities onto a small group of war criminals who had been singled out and convicted by IMTFE. With the military government completely abolished and a new democratic society established, the common IJA foot soldier believed he was relieved of all responsibility. The culpability of Japanese responsibility was further muddled when Hirohito was never charged or even interviewed for war crimes. After denouncing and relinquishing his role as a deity, he still continued in office as a symbolic unity of the people of Japan with no power whatsoever. For the soldiers then, the Emperor was not the source of Japanese culpability, but rather the military institutions warranted much, if not, all the blame. With all wartime political and military institutions cleansed from society, the Japanese soldiers, at least in their minds, were relieved of their own culpability during the war. To the soldiers, the war was over and nothing but a distant memory that need not be recalled. However, simply ascribing blame to a nefarious military structure did not resolve the

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<sup>155</sup> See Roger B. Jeans, "Victims or Victimizers? Museums, Textbooks, and the War: Debate in Contemporary Japan." *The Journal of Military History* Vol. 69 Iss. 1. (Jan 2005):149-192. Jeans examines the efforts by Japanese society to marginalize its culpability of brutality during WWII and the ongoing debate in Japan how to effectively present its past within the context of public education and collective memories.

culpability issue for many of the Allied leaders and their respective nations. The IMTFE had brought proper justice to the convicted war criminals, but, “the most controversial mission of them all was that of the Emperor... [During] the period covered by the indictment(s), there had been twenty-one premieres, thirty-four prime ministers, twenty-eight home ministers, nineteen war ministers, fifteen navy ministers, twenty-three finance ministers and fifteen separate cabinets; but only one Emperor.”<sup>156</sup> Yet, it was Emperor Hirohito who would escape any scrutinization into his participation and responsibility of Japan’s expansionist and brutal war.

Since the dawn of the Japanese capitulation of August 15, 1945, the status of Hirohito and his role during the Asian-Pacific remains highly contested to this day. The basic question ‘who was Hirohito?’ provokes a myriad of historical and academic commentaries that are as disparate as they are innumerable. “Hirohito has been variously described as a pacifist, a reactionary, a constitutional monarch, a war monger, a nationalist, and a victim of machinations by others.”<sup>157</sup> The reality is that Hirohito, during the Pacific war, could hardly be described as a pacifist and he was by no means a victim of manipulation by others. Research will show that he had taken gross advantage of the Constitution by turning himself into an autocrat rather than a monarch, and likely can be considered a war monger based on his sanctions of Japanese hostilities in the South Pacific. “From the start of Showa, Hirohito and the court entourage had actively encouraged the indoctrination of the nation in habits of self effacement and obedience to officials. From 1937 onward they had supported policies to drastically lower living standards in order to rapidly build up war power.”<sup>158</sup> Hirohito, in short, had contravened the Meiji constitution to protect him and *kokutai*, intervened on and sanctioned military action, and

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<sup>156</sup> Neil Boister and Robert Cryer, *The Tokyo International Military Tribunal: A Reappraisal* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>157</sup> Drea, *In Service of the Emperor*, 171.

<sup>158</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 536.

dismissed any Imperial responsibility for the atrocities committed by his Army. “During the first twenty years he was at the center of his nation's political, military, and spiritual life in the broadest and deepest sense, exerting authority in ways that proved disastrous for his people and those of the countries they invaded... He had presided over its expansion had let his nation into war that cost... nearly 20 million Asian lives, more than 3.1 million Japanese lives and more than sixty thousand Western Allied lives.”<sup>159</sup>

Thus, the Imperial House was to govern its affairs independent of politics and ostensibly the constitution. This would allow Hirohito to involve himself arbitrarily in all military and political affairs without the responsibility of involving the Imperial throne. It was also very important that the throne be separated convincingly from all military action, even though Hirohito was directly influencing and commenting on military action. Hirohito and the Imperial court embarked on a series of cosmetic changes that, in theory, would disassociate the throne from a war being waged in its name. For instance, Hirohito refused to allow anybody within the Imperial family to serve in any military capacity whatsoever.<sup>160</sup> This decision, amongst others, clearly demonstrates that Hirohito was aware of the consequences of the Imperial throne being directly linked to bellicose actions as his sights remained on preserving the Imperial line; as *kokutai* was paramount to any other facet of Japanese society.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, Hirohito's primary objective of leading without consequence or responsibility was now complete. In his mind, and in the minds of all his cabinet ministers and military commanders, he was the Supreme Commander of all Japanese military forces, yet had little or no responsibility for its actions from herein. Hirohito, in theory, was offering advice from the wind.

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>160</sup> Drea, *In Service of the Emperor*, 182.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

His intervention into military affairs has been documented in the wake of the 1937 China (Marco Polo) Incident. Although Hirohito liked to fashion himself as an innocuous and powerless figure during the war, he was quite involved in this state of affairs in Manchuria and China. During the phase of that war, Hirohito was constantly being briefed on the progress of the Japanese Army's progress. He attended all Imperial conferences with all the Chiefs of Staffs; Army, Navy, and political ministers in regards to war in Manchuria. He had consented to further mobilization of troops into Indochina and, despite his misgivings, allowed the Kwantung Army to continue its unauthorized incursions and atrocities against both Chinese soldiers and civilians.<sup>162</sup> He made no attempt to stop the Kwantung Army from further aggression advancement in the Manchurian province, nor did he lift his sanctions or support sanctions that would have halted any Kwantung Army action in the area.<sup>163</sup> There is no doubt that Hirohito was directly involved in the ongoing hostilities in the Chinese War. He was well briefed on certain military campaigns and was known to question and “suggest” military strategy during audiences with his ministers.<sup>164</sup> Though his defenders maintain he was simply following the will of his advisors, it is highly implausible that he maintained a passive role given the numerous meetings, briefings and conferences that he personally attended. Equally unpersuasive is the idea that the military leaders ignored or indulged their leader for its own sake. Being a revered deity, it can be argued that his opinions carried tremendous sway that likely influenced the military leaders. And this influence and involvement only increased after the declaration of war against the United States.

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<sup>162</sup> Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army*, 189, 217, and Bix, *Hirohito*, 239-240.

<sup>163</sup> Drea, *In Service of the Emperor*, 210-227.

<sup>164</sup> Wetzler, *Hirohito and War*, 186.

The Pacific War was always feared by the military and political ministers; most felt it could not be won in a long, attritional war. Thus, a quick strike and debilitation of Allied naval assets was seen as the only solution to avoid a protracted war that would eventually find its way to the homeland; a most unacceptable outcome for the Japanese nation. As the supreme leader of the Yamato race and the military, it is infeasible to ascertain that Hirohito would not have a direct role overseeing the prosecution of war against the western powers. Most assuredly, he applied his influence and will where he saw fit. His activities are known to have commenced during the long discussions about the southward advance and the sanctioning of the Pearl Harbor attack.<sup>165</sup>

"After the war Hirohito often repeated his reasons for not opposing more vigorously the militarists in prewar [Pacific] times: he was only a constitutional monarch and feared being deposed if he did not go along with the militarists."<sup>166</sup> This statement contains some very glaring contradictions. If he was so frightened of the militarists, he could have easily deposed of them through Imperial edicts while invoking more influence to fill his cabinet with liberal democrats. He chose not to. In fact, he chose to associate himself with the Army and Navy ministers rather than his political factions. While it is true that he did survive a coup d'état directed at his military cabinet with swift and brutal military action, it is also true that he then ordered the military to assemble a police guard to put down any potential unrest.<sup>167</sup> This is hardly the actions of a fearful Emperor who possessed little, if any, political and military power. So his fear of being deposed by the military is highly misplaced.

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<sup>165</sup> "Extracts from the Diary of Marquis Koichi Kido" in Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, eds., *The Pacific War Papers: Japanese Documents of World War II* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2004), 125. The entry dated October 13, 1941, specifically states that Hirohito requested a declaration of war against the United States due to unsuccessful negotiations between Japan and the U.S. over economic sanctions.

<sup>166</sup> Wetzler, *Hirohito and War*, 181.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

Nonetheless, many of his defenders insist that Hirohito's source of power was the imperial sanction; however, that was subject to the Imperial Conferences convened during the war era. The Imperial conferences were highly structured affairs that supposedly denied the Emperor from any decision-making authority in regards to military matters. Further, he had no real power to dominate the outcome of these conferences. Thus, according to his defenders, all subject matter brought before the Emperor at the conference had been borne out of the legislature or the military staff, argued and agreed upon and it was the Emperor's duty to sanction and approve all policy presented at the conferences. Within this environment, his defenders posit, the Emperor simply appealed to his constitutional duties and approved without comment; another example of simply accepting *fait accompli*.<sup>168</sup> However, other scholarship has proffered that the conferences were convened only *after* the Emperor had approved all policy matters that were being presented.

Prior to these conferences, a final draft of its proceedings were prepared by the political and military staffs and presented to the Emperor in private.<sup>169</sup> The Emperor, of course, was free to express his views on these drafts, and many would be included in the final draft. But, if he did not like anything within the draft, he would simply refuse to sanction it; therefore one could logically conclude that in order to achieve official Imperial sanction of a military political policy, it was prudent that these drafts would reflect the Emperor's will. "It seems clear from these practices that the decisions approved at the Imperial conferences were therefore voluntarily sanctioned by the Emperor."<sup>170</sup> It also important to note that the Emperor did set the agenda, spent hours questioning his military leaders on the strategy and operations of the Japanese Army

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<sup>168</sup> Large, *Emperor Hirohito*, 108.

<sup>169</sup> Drea, *In Service of the Emperor*, 173.

<sup>170</sup> Awaya Kentaro, "Emperor Showa's Accountability for War," *Japan Quarterly* Vol. 38 Iss. 3 (Oct-Dec 1998): 394.

and Navy, and either sanctioned or did not comment on these matters. Nonetheless, it is pure sophistry to believe that these conferences were nothing more than a monarchical ritual that served as an indulgence for the Emperor. He fostered his will upon his top leaders as the Supreme Commander to sanction all or some of their decisions in prosecuting the war.<sup>171</sup> Hirohito's practice of questioning his political and military leaders regarding their respective war policies was not limited to pre-conference audiences, but would soon become a regular and expected duty of the Emperor as the dawn of the Pacific War shrouded upon Japan.

What is important during this time is that "the Emperor widened and deepened his access to include just about all military intelligence... He routinely received drafts of developing war plans and full explanations of operations, accompanied by detailed maps, informing him why an operation should be mounted and the units that would be carrying it out."<sup>172</sup> Battle and situational reports were delivered daily and, after the Pacific War commenced, shown to the Emperor at any time of day or night. These included itemization of combat losses and their causes, places where Japanese troops were doing well or not so well. Even telegrams coming into the Imperial Headquarters from the front lines were shown to Hirohito by his Army and Navy aides-de-camp.<sup>173</sup> These remarkable events proved beyond the realm of implicit accusations, that the Emperor explicitly and doggedly sought to be informed of all war progress, but also injected himself into the entire war effort. This is not surprising as he fashioned himself as a Supreme Commander of all military forces operating under his name.

"The materials he received were timely, detailed, and of high quality – as indeed they had to be, for the Emperor was not only directing the grand strategic unfolding of the war, but

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<sup>171</sup> Drea, *In Service of the Emperor*, 173-174.

<sup>172</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 389.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

pressing for solutions to the inevitable mishaps and miscalculations of his staff and field commands." <sup>174</sup>This is simply more evidence of Hirohito's direct influence upon the execution and implementation of war strategy, doctrine, and tactics by the Japanese military. And these meetings and briefings were not by happenstance, but were planned regularly and well in advance. The Emperor arguably, may well have been one of the more informed war councilors within the entire Imperial Court and the war ministry.

It is virtually impossible to believe that Hirohito was a puppet monarchy under the hard-line rule of militarists. It is also beyond the realm of belief, that he was unaware of the actions and atrocities taking place in the Pacific area against Allied forces. It may be that the Emperor believed in victory at any costs; but victory to Hirohito was more centered on preservation of the *kokutai*; that is the Imperial throne, then he was on the saving and salvaging of human lives. Yet, in terms of human lives, can it be ascertained that the Emperor was privy or aware of the atrocities being committed by his troops?

Notwithstanding the daily reports of casualties- friend and foe alike, there is some evidence that Hirohito was not only aware of his army's actions, but also sanctioned and rewarded such behavior. During the Manchurian affair, Hirohito remained intensely silent as the reports addressing the Kwantung Army's aggression against the Chinese were disseminated among the War Council members. Although Hirohito later exonerated himself from any responsibility, he still bestowed the Kwantung leaders with military honors for their success. Further, as hostilities in China increased, Hirohito was known to keep up on all affairs developing in that theatre. As mentioned, he was constantly questioning his war ministers on policy and planning and influencing its outcome. He agreed with the decision to "to fight a

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 389



decisive battle in 'the enemy capital' because at that time, like most of his high command, he had subscribed to the view that one big blow would bring China and Kai-shek to his knees and end the fighting."<sup>175</sup> He was relieved when advised of the capture of Nanking, but yet claimed no knowledge of the ensuing rampage. The idea that Hirohito was unaware what was happening in China, specifically Nanking, scratches the edges of credulity. He was known to keep up on the Japanese press, was constantly questioning his aides of the situation in China, and as Commander-in-Chief it is certainly within the realm of possibility that these atrocities were brought to his attention, yet he did nothing about it; even after the U.S. ambassador formally protested his army's actions in China. This attitude would have long reaching effects throughout the war.

"In such ways did Hirohito exercise his authority indirectly to condone the criminality of his troops. Although he may have never privately dismayed by what it happened that Nanking, he took no notice of it publicly, and did nothing to make up for it by taking an interest in and changing Japanese policy on the treatment of prisoners of war."<sup>176</sup> This is a powerful assertion as it clearly directs at least partial blame to Hirohito for the behavior of Japanese soldiers during World War II. It also directly implicates Hirohito in the policy – or non-policy – of treatment of POWs; a policy that was reinforced during the Pacific War. Clearly Hirohito had little concern about enemy combatants in the hands of his subjects.

Hirohito knew the implications of such a policy as he was well-versed in international law via his long education. "He had also read the clause calling for respect for international law and Imperial war Rescripts of his grandfather and father. Yet he never had orders issued to his

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 339

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 339

Armed Forces that would have prevented the mass murder or mistreatment of Chinese prisoners... For them the rule of international law was something that, ever since the end of World War I, the British and the Americans had wanted to develop and spread [Western ideals of international law] because it served their interests, not Japan's."<sup>177</sup> It is clear that Japan believed its culture was the underlying rule of law and had precedence over any existing internationally approved warfare laws. The Japanese believed they would play under their own rules, as sanctioned by the Emperor, in order to achieve its own objectives.

Still, Hirohito insisted he was completely unaware of the atrocities committed on the field of battle and the POW camps. However, his statement about kamikaze pilots belies his ignorance: "You really cannot hide your sympathy for the special attack pilots. It was an unreasonable step which was unavoidably tragic."<sup>178</sup> He is speaking about the use of kamikazes at Okinawa as a result of the loss of the Navy, and seems to demonstrate his acceptance of any tactic that would protect his legacy and preserve *kokutai*, even at the expense of the soldiers and ostensibly, the nation.

From the beginning to the end of the war, Hirohito played a highly active role in supporting and sanctioning the decisions carried out in his name. He was especially attentive to the army and navy strategy throughout the war. He was constantly informed by his aides about the progress of the war, and also enjoyed a special relationship with Prime Minister Hideki Tojo. Both shared a similar vision for Japan's future, and both revered *kokutai*. Nonetheless, Hirohito was not puppet subject to the machinations of a militarist cabinet. He was, in fact, implicitly involved in every facet of prewar and wartime military and political policy. Regardless of his

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 360

<sup>178</sup> Drea. *In Service of the Emperor*. 200

attempts to build a “Chrysanthemum Curtain” between the Imperial Throne and the political and military spheres, Hirohito simply was not a dispassionate observer, but a war-time leader. But unlike his contemporaries (Hitler, Goering, and Tojo et. al.) he would not only dodge any culpability of war crimes, he would witness and participate in a complete revision and cleansing (whitewash) of the history of the Asian-Pacific War.

By the winter of 1946, Emperor Hirohito was considered a war criminal by the West. Many wanted him to be questioned under oath about his role during various Imperial conferences, his knowledge about the treatment of POWs, and of course, his role as a supreme commander of the Imperial Japanese military forces. What loomed was what form of punishment lay ahead if his innocence could not be established. American occupiers had just finished a new constitution that had stripped the monarch of all political powers. "Hoping to continue to use him for occupational purposes where recognizing that the burden of proof and fallen on him, Hirohito's American defenders needed to know how he felt about a lost war that had been fought in his name. They especially wanted him to address the glaring contradiction of why, if he had been strong enough to surrender his Empire at the end of the war, he had not been equally strong enough to have prevented war in the first place, thereby saving millions of lives."<sup>179</sup> Hirohito essentially had to account for all his actions, but only attempted to exculpate himself from any responsibility of Japanese malfeasance during the war. He had to do so secretly in order to assign responsibilities of many the charges against him to others in the government; some of which were his most loyal subjects. However, Post -War U.S. policy would play a significant role in relieving Hirohito from any war crime charges.<sup>180</sup> He was considered to be far more valuable as

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<sup>179</sup> Bix. *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 1

<sup>180</sup> U.S. Policy had effectively eliminated any chance that Hirohito would face charges. He was forbidden to be deposed or interviewed by the IMTFE for testimony in preparation for the Tokyo trials. For further explanation see

a goodwill ambassador during the occupation; assuring a smooth disarmament and transition. Although he eventually renounced his divinity and accepted his role as a “symbol monarch”, Hirohito not once ever offered any remorse or regret for Japan’s role in the Asian Pacific War and insisted, to the end of his life, that he had no culpability for the prosecution of the war.

In the final analysis, Hirohito was not shy from acting on military and political matters. He was never challenged about the duality the constitution that equivocated separating the roles of being an Emperor or supreme commander. He merely proceeded by intervening in these matters and influencing some of the decisions behind what is called the "Chrysanthemum Curtain." Hirohito presided over a pluralistic, consensus-oriented decision making process and then sanctioned the result in public.”<sup>181</sup> The reality is that Hirohito, during the Pacific War, could hardly be described as a pacifist and was by no means a victim of manipulation by others. He was part of a committee that prosecuted a brutal war, replete with unspeakable atrocities, all committed in his name. In sum, Hirohito was a war-time leader who definitively asserted himself into the development of military policies and strategies in the prosecution of war. His sanctions were hardly perfunctory, nor were his Imperial Conferences. His actions and decisions definitively effected the direction of the war; often to the detriment of the nation. Not until capitulation was imminent did Hirohito begin his quest for self-exoneration from any war time culpability.

All attempts by Hirohito to fashion himself as a tacit constitutional monarchy are disingenuous at best. Despite his effort to exculpate him from any culpability during the Chinese

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Hal Brands, “Rhetoric, Public Opinion, and Policy in the American Debate over the Japanese Emperor During World War II”, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2005): 431-458 and “Who Saved the Emperor? The MacArthur Myth and U.S. Policy toward Hirohito and the Japanese Imperial Institution, 1942-1946.” *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 75, No. 2 (2006): 271-305.

<sup>181</sup> Wetzler, *Hirohito and War*, 202.

conflict and the Pacific War they simply cannot reconcile the evidence. Corroborated by his own words and that of his chief aides and ministers, his actions during the Asian-Pacific War leaves no doubt the Hirohito played a significant role as a military leader. "Neither an arch conspirator nor a dictator, he was rather the leading participant in, and remains a key to understanding, the major political and military events of his nation in the 20th century." <sup>182</sup> Thus, Hirohito should have been listed among suspected Class A war criminals and at least deposed as to his role during the Asian-Pacific War. However, due to the collaboration between the United States State Department, the War Department and eventually SCAP, this was strictly forbidden as it was perceived that any action taken against the Showa Emperor would impede the disarming and repatriation efforts of the occupation forces. Additionally, it was believed that a peaceful reconstruction of post-war Japan required a figurehead to assume and accept a leadership role in bringing vast reforms to a devastated nation. Hirohito fit that role as prescribed by the state department. The Emperor had successfully avoided any responsibility and culpability as war criminal; much to the disdain of Pacific Allied nations. Hirohito, to these former occupied countries, was a true war criminal who fortuitously avoided prosecution. This dilemma and controversy would not recede throughout the Hirohito's life; as it was never fully resolved by those nations that bore the brunt of Japanese atrocities. His death in 1989 did not end the controversy, in fact it served only to exacerbate the apology issue- that is a formal apology from the Japanese Government taking full responsibility of its behavior during the Asian-Pacific War- that remains elusive to this day.

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<sup>182</sup> Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 18.

## Conclusion

Assessing the causes of Japanese atrocities can be a difficult task to undertake. Even though there is much disagreement to the exact reason, any attempt to compartmentalize the abuse set upon civilians and belligerents would exclude many crucial and significant aspects that influenced, impelled and demanded the soldier to take such actions. These aspects are varied as they are disparate when examined individually and without connective analysis. But, when tightly interwoven into a nationalistic education and militaristic inculcation, these precepts are exposed as a deadly ideology imbued into a mindset of soldier since childhood. The progression of emperor ideology within the mores of Japanese culture and society came at a cost of individual liberty and the loss of an individualist persona. For the Japanese civilian and soldier, these reformation elements presaged the creation of a militaristic society that conveyed a brutal war upon its proximal regional sovereignties. From the beginning, it was purposely constructed to retain and maintain *kokutai*

The ruling elites of the Meiji Restoration set out to transform a splintered society into a nation beholden to the emperor ideology. Meiji, his court, military leaders and political leaders were determined to rid Japan of the shogunate influence and replace it with the return of a singular and divine leader. There was no facet of Japanese society that would not be affected by this policy. Thus, obedience to the Emperor was a compulsory concept that all Japanese were expected to follow during this critical epoch. Despite opposition from traditionalist

oppositionists, the restoration of the Imperial Throne was nearly complete by the time of the First Sino- Japanese war. Although there were disappointing results in the battlefield, the Meiji leaders believed that they were, in fact, achieving their desire to modernize Japan within western military strategies, yet keeping the sacred precepts of Japanese culture in tact; both politically and militarily. The military, at that time, began to alter the bushido code from a noble ancient warrior creed into a militarized doctrine of death. Fusing it with the Shinto tenets of racial and spiritual superiority, the modern bushido bore no likeness to its original state. In effect, army leaders had weaponized bushido and determined that it would serve as the primary doctrine that guided soldiers in the field of battle. The Russo- Japanese War of 1904-5 would witness the first conflict where the conduct of war was to be lead by the newly manufactured bushido. Although the army believed it was a compelling element that led to the eventual victory, military leaders were not entirely satisfied with the results.

The victory against an Occidental Army in 1905 (Russia) served as flashpoint for the military and political leaders to continue its efforts to further impel an entire nation to the efficacy and necessity of strict adherence to emperor ideology. This was not without problems, as the Army leaders were not overly pleased with the performance of its foot soldiers. It would be a catalyst to strengthen civilian patriotism in terms of emperor ideology. The military, with the implicit approval of the Imperial House and the Diet, would embark on a complete overhaul of the Japanese educational system that would see the militarization of the public schools and also begin a slow but effective use of oppression and intimidation to rid Japanese society of any western intellectual political and religious dogma. At the time of Meiji's death, this operation was in full force, and it was within this environment the Crown Prince, Hirohito, began his education.

The Taisho Era witnessed the inclusion of democratic reforms that some saw as a distortion and an anathema to Japanese culture. Upon the enthronement of Hirohito, these reforms were struck down and a return to the Meiji culture ensued. The primary and secondary education systems were permeated with an increasing pervasive military training, and all students, regardless of age, were required to submit to this compulsory schooling. The infallibility of the Imperial Throne was central to the education, and was simultaneously being conscribed into the fabric of Japanese society and culture. The preservation of the Imperial Line and national polity (*kokutai*) were paramount to the existence of the Japanese nation. Hence, as a youth being educated in Japan during the Showa, it is not surprising that a generation of Imperial zealots emerged in time to protect and defend the principles of *kokutai* against western intervention. Combining a lifetime of nationalistic indoctrination with brutal and abusive military training, a fanatical and ferocious foot-soldier ready and willing to sacrifice his life- and others- in order to protect his Emperor, his honor and his family had been created. This type of mindset can easily become unpredictable as standard rules of morality and the value of life become secondary to the preservation of a superior nationalistic, spiritual and racial dogma. Further, military policies toward surrender and capture only exacerbated the fanatical behavior of the soldier. These diverse aspects of Japanese society had one constant that was omnipresent at every stage of a soldier's life: the Emperor Hirohito.

Hirohito approved and sanctioned all aspects of nurturing Japanese society to follow his vision of a Japanese Empire. He allowed the court and his ministers to oversee the transformation of a nation into an autocratic and militaristic society. He tacitly approved all military action in China and the Pacific. He overlooked or ignored the atrocities being committed in his name; at times even rewarding the perpetrators. He speciously attempted to insulate



himself from any responsibility from political and military matters by invoking certain tenets of the Meiji constitution, while simultaneously influencing and sanctioning these same policies. When faced with surrender, he believed that the preservation of the throne (*kokutai*) was paramount to the welfare of his subjects. Yet, when capitulation was complete, he pleaded ignorance in these matters at the expense of the lives of his most loyal subjects. Hirohito, to some, was, in fact, a war criminal. To others, he was a coward. Yet to some, he remains a complex and illusive war figure whose real identity may never be known. Despite these contrasting analyses, there is no doubt that Hirohito was implicitly involved with the creation of the Japanese soldier. It was Hirohito that they sought to protect, and it was in his name that the sordid atrocities were carried out. Yet, to this day, he is vigorously protected by his nation and the government. And, Japan, like Hirohito, as a collective nation and culture, has yet to come to terms with its culpability of its actions during the Pacific War; and may never do so. If not for U.S. State Department policy, Hirohito, at the insistence of the Pacific Allies, most likely would have been tried. Whether he would have been convicted, given the problems with incriminating evidence, is sheer conjecture. Still, he would have been forced to testify under intense examination by the IMTFE prosecutors. There, perhaps, the Showa Emperor may have indulged himself by testifying his own truth against that of his own advisors; some of which advocated for his abdication.<sup>183</sup> Unfortunately, this was never to occur, and upon Hirohito's denouncement of his divinity, he simply washed his hands of any culpability of his country, his subjects, and his Army's brutal and inhumane behavior in the course of the conquest of East Asia. Japanese society, as a whole, would soon follow this symbolic gesture with its own "explanation" as to its own rejection of responsibility.

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<sup>183</sup>Large, *Emperor Hirohito*, 131-134. Large recounts the central arguments for and against abdication as forwarded by Hirohito's Imperial advisors.

The question of responsibility remains unresolved within Japan nearly seventy years after war's end. "[War] responsibility is not clearly established in the minds of many Japanese today, no matter how certain the rest the world may be about it. The Japanese people were not, in fact, held responsible for the war by the allied occupation forces, who tried, convicted and executed selected Japanese leaders and military figures for plotting an "aggressive war" and for condoning and encouraging war crimes."<sup>184</sup> Japanese public perception of World War II has been complicated by its inclination not to bring harm or disgrace to its ancestors and has also established a victimhood mentality due to the atomic bombings. This wistful thinking also explains the Japanese portraying themselves as victims of Allied belligerence and not the fanatical victimizers depicted during the war crimes. Many insist that the Allies forced Japan in to war via the debilitating economic sanctions and objecting to Japan's policy of "liberating" East Asia from western colonialism. However, it would be a hard-pressed task to find any "liberated" nation to agree to such fantasy.

Nonetheless, the real problem lies within Japanese culture as it simply and sincerely could not and cannot admit to the ruthless nature of its World War II involvement.<sup>185</sup> National victimhood became a central theme in the historical narrative of Japanese education, which appeared almost immediately after the occupation ended. Although there have been numerous efforts by Japanese scholars to correct this revisionist history, it is still met with great resistance by many Japanese politicians and educators.<sup>186</sup> The reason is simple: the outcome and the accompanying atrocities of the Pacific War are still an embarrassment to Japanese history; which

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<sup>184</sup> Cook and Cook, *Japan at War*, 15.

<sup>185</sup> Daniel A. Metreaux, "Japan's Historical Myopia" *American Asian Review* Vol. 18 Iss. 2 (Summer, 2008), 23.

<sup>186</sup> The late Dr Saburo Ienaga spent much of his professional career fighting government censorship of any references about WWII that it deemed dishonorable to national pride. He filed numerous lawsuits to end the practice, but had limited success in his real objective: restricting all government overview of history textbooks. The struggle between educators and political leaders continues to this day.

by extension is part of its cultural fabric. Many wish to ignore or simply whitewash away any stain that might sully Japan's proud and sacred twenty-six hundred year history. Many of the pre-war beliefs- primarily those of Shintoism- are still deeply held by those of that era; as evidenced by the hallowed ethos bestowed upon the Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>187</sup> This sacred shrine serves as venue to revere Japan's fallen warriors, including kamikaze pilots and war criminals. Many veterans believe their service and those of their deceased colleagues deserve and indeed have earned Japan's deepest respect.

As time passed, the public began to accept more democratic reforms, which included a civilian-run military, and also the outcome of the Asian- Pacific War. "But for the soldiers, defeat did not automatically erase the beliefs for which they had been fighting. Correspondence between "minor" war criminals and their families in the immediate postwar years revealed regret but not guilt and continuing loyalty to the old values".<sup>188</sup> Old habits were hard to break, as soldiers believed what they had done was correct, had little regret for the atrocities they committed, for it had been carried out in the name of the Emperor; an accepted practice of obedience. Was this the behavior of comrades-in-arms sharing war time yarns? Were these veterans practicing an ages-old ritual of keeping precious friendships established during the most desperate of times? In western culture these are common occurrences between military veterans. However, in Japan, it may be something entirely different, as the continued denials of the complicity of atrocities were still firmly ensconced within the persona of the WWII veteran.

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<sup>187</sup> The Yasukuni Shrine, which some refer-erroneously- as Japan's "Arlington, has been the subject of much political wrangling following the death of Hirohito. Although it functions as a source to memorialize the Japanese war dead, it has also caused a great amount of anguish from Japan's former enemies. The Shrine, which is privately operated, enshrined all the convicted Class A war criminals in 1998. This caused a great uproar, as the symbolism of honoring criminals who were executed for crimes against peace and humanity only intensified foreign condemnation of Japan's historical amnesia.

<sup>188</sup> Harries, *Soldiers*, 470.

It may be time to consider an entirely different concept outside of conventional western morality in defining and appropriating culpability upon the Japanese. The culture of “saving face” is an essential element to the fabric of Japanese society, which has no ideological or political boundaries and is often overlooked as an element that dictates the culpability and apology issue. While many commentators and historians concentrate on political shifts in Japan and ideological charged scholarship when explaining these issues, the Japanese, arguably, may not have any inclination to admit to any event, whether in war or peace, that would bring dishonor to the nation; regardless of the facts. The purity of the Yamato race and its ancient beginnings is a powerful ethos that has pervaded Japanese culture for centuries. Therefore, an inconvenient fifteen-year era is, by no means, going to denigrate the reputation of an ancient and modern society. “Saving face”, whether it is recognized outside of Japan or not, is immaterial to Japanese society. Keeping its dignity is of paramount importance to its people and its long history. This cultural phenomena may have more influence on the issue of war responsibility than many scholars believe. Nonetheless, it is a concept that is quite difficult to analyze, just as it would be to study a Christian’s faith in God. Still, Iris Chang proffers that “Japanese culture will not move forward until it too admits not only to the world but to itself how improper were its actions of just half a century ago.”<sup>189</sup> Given the enormity of this task, it seems almost an insurmountable undertaking to change such an ingrained canon.

Post-war Japan has experienced dazzling success in democratic constitutionalism and free markets. They have become an important ally to the United States in maintaining peace in that region of the Far East. Both nations have been subjected to many internal struggles over political and military policy, yet, since 1945, the relationship remains strong. However, the undertow of

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<sup>189</sup> Chang, *Rape of Nanking*, 14.

the culpability and apology issue remains alive at present; especially in East Asia. This current of discontent, primarily emanating from China and Korea, presents a major obstacle in Japan's quest to become a regional political leader. However, Japan has shown little penchant to participate in this demand, even as China asserts her sovereignty into International and Japanese waters. In the end though, it appears that time may be the only solution. "Nostalgia and times are eroding the reality of war. Those veterans recall their 'total commitment' described the experience in Kiplingesque terms: a good, hard campaign that brought out the best in courage and dedication... The passage of time has also dimmed the perception of the real nature of war."<sup>190</sup> Only time will tell if or when the Japanese and its erstwhile enemies can finally put to rest its past and begin to fulfill a new beginning.

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<sup>190</sup> Ienaga, *Pacific War*, 254.

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